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# **IN THE LARGER PERSONAL INTEREST**

**An Investigation into Indian politics since 1947**



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**V. K. Murthi**

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**In the larger personal interest**

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To my parents

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## Preface

Mrs Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency in India on 26th June 1975, and edged out the country away from the orbit of democracy. The nation slid into the clutches of authoritarian rule. Human rights were trampled upon. The judiciary was browbeaten, tamed and brought to its knees. The Press lay spread-eagled, forced to toe the line defined by the rulers, muzzled and silenced, allowed only to sing songs of praise of the regime. The Constitution was trimmed and shorn of many of its democratic regulations, rewritten by hurriedly sponsored amendments to suit the demands of authoritarianism that went under the name of democracy. Covertly and overtly, democracy was undermined, bound and fettered and chained, forced to be the mask for dictatorship.

The blame, therefore, for the 19 months of Emergency and its excesses has been placed on Mrs Indira Gandhi and her close associates.

But, this is too simplistic a view.

The Emergency which pushed the nation into the mire of terror was not something that came out of nowhere. It was the natural culmination of the gradual erosion of human values and democratic virtues. The nation's path, from the day we began our tryst with destiny, had followed devious routes. It was paved with excessive zeal for power. It was strengthened by exceptional zest for amassing fortunes by fair means and foul. It was bound by extreme indifference to the needs of the masses. It was marked by a complete negation of the concept of nationalism.

The Emergency was the outward expression of the rot that had set in in the national body politic. It was a tragedy whose scenario was prepared and developed over many years since 1947.

We lulled ourselves with the belief that all was well with the nation. We had rolled up in cocoons, spun out of a false sense of security. We tagged blinkers on to our eyes. We bound ourselves with the chains forged out of our mistakes. We hopelessly entangled ourselves with the threads of sycophancy, nepotism, economic imbalances, political chicanery and broken promises.

We swore by Gandhian principles, deviated from them in actual practice, revealing an ever-widening gap between precept and practice.

Such conditions could only conduce to the growth of the many-headed monster which surged up to devour India's infant, ailing democracy in 1975.

The Emergency, therefore, was not something unexpected. It did not spring on us from nowhere. Initially we mistook it as a surprise pack of dynamite, dropped into our midst by self-seeking politicians. This was the belief that many people shared. It is a belief which holds sway over many people even today.

Yet it is wrong. For the Emergency was not a force, induced and induced into the national scene. It was just the form that the decadence of the nation took.

No doubt, politicians were swept away by the ecstasy that goes with power and allowed themselves to be led away by the pleasures and treasures which came their way, from their noble goal

They could get away with such blunt negation of the basic requirements of good government only because the intellectuals shut their eyes to the crimes of the political leadership. The nation would not have landed itself in the lap of dictatorship if our intellectuals—administrators, educationalists, journalists, economists, scientists etc.—had not surrendered their will to the powers that be.

The industrialists, traders and organised labour lent their bit to the preparation of the ground for the growth of authoritarianism. They vied with each other to corner all the benefits of progress to themselves. They clamoured for a large and yet larger share of the nation's limited resources. They did not stop their avarice, exploited all their skill and ability to corner all benefits for themselves, ignoring the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The landed gentry mouthed platitudes, hesitantly approved land reforms after taking all steps to nullify the benefits which could accrue as a result to the landless peasants. They resorted to *benami*

transactions, subtle sub-divisions of excess land among their near and dear ones, falsification of records, and thereby retaining all their lands while creating an impression that they had only such land that came under the ceiling.

These aberrations, however, were possible only because the vast majority of Indians, living in the villages, ignorant of their rights, unable to spot out where their interests lay, incapable of strengthening democracy by judiciously exploiting the power vested in them through franchise, failed to stake their claim for a better deal.

Since the dark days of the Emergency were a stage in the natural evolution of Indian power-politics based on the politicians' self-interests, it may be well to remember that Indian politics is far from healthy, stable and ethical norms. The wind of corruption continues to blow through the corridors of power; politicians continue to neglect national interests in their petty bickering, administrators, planners, and intellectuals continue to flounder in the backwaters of empty jargon; and the people continue to suffer.

The writing on the wall is still there to see and take heed of.



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## ONE

# Democratic Caesar

The sun had begun to set on the colonial British Empire. It had only a few more minutes to call its own.

The august hall of the Constituent Assembly hummed with the sounds of many people. The leaders of the nation, who had wrested freedom from alien rulers, sat expectantly in their seats, tense with excitement. They were the elite who would define the bounds of propriety that free India's Constitution, yet to be framed, would assume. On them would rest the future of the nation. They came from all parts of the vast sprawling country. Perhaps never before had such varied peoples gathered together in such sublime brotherhood. They provided a panorama of India and her people. Stocky, tall, fair-complexioned men from Punjab; plump, short, dark men from the South of the Vindhyas ; and snub-nosed, yellow-tinged men from the East merged into one vast conglomeration of Indians, fired by the same hopes and aspirations. They were bound together in the strength and splendour of common nationality.

There were onlookers also ; men, women and children for whom the gift of freedom had been won. They were a motley and colourful crowd from even the most remote and far-flung corners of the grand mosaic called India.

An air of great expectancy reigned over the hall. The hustle and bustle of the crowd rippled across the vast space and was echoed back under the high-domed ceiling.

On the raised platform sat Lord Mountbatten, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and a few other celebrities.

As minutes ticked by, as the midnight hour approached, the crowd became restive. Their faces reflected a rare glow, suffused with delight. They were witnesses to one of history's greatest moments. History itself was being changed.

There were a few in the large gathering who were weighed down by a vague sense of guilt. They were the people who could not reconcile themselves to the painful dividing of the country. But, as the appointed hour approached, their pain lost its edge. They were carried away by the tide of happiness which eddied around. Euphoria filled them, erasing the feeling of guilt. Pakistan was no longer the poetic fancy of Iqbal. It was not even an idea which stirred a Muslim student, studying in London. It was no longer the political weapon with which Jinnah fought his political battle. It was a reality. None could wish it away.

At the stroke of twelve, blasts from the conch shells reverberated through the hall. These blasts mixed with the muted booms of guns that wafted in. Those who, like Aldous Huxley, could give words to every little sound, read the message, 'Britain leaves, India wins freedom' into the noise that erupted all around.

Wild cheers filled the hall. Some people hugged their neighbours. A few quietly wiped the dampness away from their eyes. Some broke down and sobbed.

India was free. Power vested in Indian leadership. The future of the nation no longer depended on the grand imperial dreams of the British. Indians were free to chart their own course.

The hopes which filled the people of India found expression in the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru :

"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment, we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity..."

"The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future ?

"That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over."

Those were words that came from the innermost recesses of his heart. They surged up, carrying all the primordial forces which sustain the finest and noblest aspects of human relationship.

Thunderous ovation rent the hall when Pandit Nehru finished his speech.

It was the proudest moment of his life. He stood, pensive and thoughtful, a gentle smile on his lips. The rose on his *achkan* was fresh, a bright red symbol of the man. He looked the very picture of confidence and strength, the captain who would steer free India to a new and bright future.

Power had come to him after nearly a quarter century of struggle. He had spent many years in prison. He had been at the centre of all the tortuous conferences and discussions and negotiations which formed the prelude to the final settlement. He had put up with privations, personal tragedies, physical chastisements with cool courage. Never during the prolonged struggle had he lost sight of the goal. He had remained a close and trusted associate of Mahatma Gandhi. He had been loyal to his mentor. In Gandhiji, he saw the most potent instrument of liberation.

Nehru, of course, was not a mute follower. He had a mind of his own. He tagged along with the Mahatma, generally accepted

the guidelines set by the great soul. But, he had the courage to differ from his master when he found the idealism of the Mahatma running counter to the demands of practicability.

Like the Mahatma, Pandit Nehru too enjoyed the love of the people in immense measure. The masses hailed him as their beloved leader. They looked up to him for guidance, and expected him to provide effective and competent leadership. Their hopes were centred round him, their aspirations were symbolised by him. They saw, in him, their only road to redemption. They gave him the freedom to set the pattern and style of functioning of Indian democracy. This freedom imposed on Pandit Nehru a very onerous responsibility. It was up to him to evolve traditions and conventions which would ensure full scope for democracy to flourish.

He was aware of his responsibility. His speech fully reflected this awareness. He knew that words, unless matched by the stern will to translate them into something tangible by concerted action, become millstones round the necks of mere word spinners. Words do infinite harm where action is at a discount.

Pandit Nehru resolved to give the infant democracy a good start.

This resolution imposed a tremendous strain on him. He was not, by temperament, suited to play the role of a democrat. He had a touch of Caesar in him. He was aware of his failings. On his election as Congress President in 1937, he analysed his mental make-up and spelt it out in an article in *The Modern Review* :

“Jawaharlal ki jai. The Rāshtrapati looked up as he passed swiftly through the waiting crowds ; his hands went up, and his hard, pale face lit up with a smile.....The smile passed away and the face became stern and sad. Almost it seemed that the smile and the gesture accompanying it had little reality ; they were just tricks of the trade to gain the goodwill of the crowd whose darling he had become. Was it so ? Watch him again. Is all this natural or the carefully thought out trickery of the public man ? Perhaps it is both... From the far North to Cape Comorin, he has gone like some

triumphant Caesar, leaving a trail of glory and a legend behind him.....Is it his will to power that is driving him from crowd to crowd ? What if the fancy turns ? Men like Jawaharlal, with all their great capacity for great and good work, are unsafe in a democracy. He calls himself a democrat and a socialist, and no doubt he does so in all earnestness.....but a little twist and he might turn into a dictator.....He has all the makings of a dictator in him—vast popularity, a strong will, energy, pride.....an intolerance of others and a certain contempt for the weak and the inefficient. His flashes of temper are well-known. His overwhelming desire to get things done, to sweep away what he dislikes and build anew, will hardly brook for long the slow processes of democracy... His conceit is formidable. It must be checked. We want no Caesars.”

Consciously, Pandit Nehru tried to suppress the streak of authoritarianism ingrained in him. But, he could not succeed very much in containing what was natural to him. Frank Moraes rightly noted that ‘Nehru enjoyed the feeling of power ; he had always been confident, but power gave him a new air of authority ’

This was further strengthened by his conviction that he was Gandhiji’s political heir. He assumed, automatically and rightly too, that the people were behind him. He sensed that after the Mahatma, he would be the most powerful force on the Indian scene. He looked around, saw that except for two or three nationalists who could come somewhere near him in political stature, all others were mere pygmies. This created a feeling in him that he alone could lead the nation out of the rut into which British rule had led the country. He alone could bring about economic liberation. And without economic liberation, political liberation was an empty shell.

It was in Nehru’s hands to set the trend for the future. It was upto him to develop healthy traditions which would go well with democracy. He had the freedom to chalk out the path which the nation could tread towards true liberty, real fraternity and tangible equality. The nation expected him to measure upto the demands of the time, to define the strategies in such a way as to ensure

fulgent growth of the nascent democracy.

This was the prime task of the hour. This was the task to which Pandit Nehru dedicated himself. But his natural bent of mind asserted itself over his idealism quite often. He swore by democracy, yet pursued from the very beginning a policy aimed at augmenting the powers of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, Nehru argued, was at the centre of all power. Power flowed out of him, into his Cabinet colleagues. Therefore, he had the right to dictate terms to them. He could decide the range and scope of their activities. He could intercede into their moves, ride roughshod over regions exclusively under the control of any minister; intrude without even the least display of formal intimation into the activities of various ministries. He believed that his partners in the new democracy would take the cue from him, an Olympian deity issuing directions to mere mortals.

This concept of his role as the Prime Minister went against all accepted norms of Cabinet functioning, negated the idea of joint Cabinet responsibility.

In a viable and strong democracy, the Prime Minister has a well-defined role. He is not the master who leads the Cabinet like an autocrat. He is a friend and leader who guides and shapes the policies of the government, taking into account the pledges made to the people who have reposed total confidence in him and his colleagues through the general elections. He has to interpret the aspirations of the masses, coordinate the functions of the various ministries, so that their collective efforts lead to the pre-defined goal.

The Prime Minister, who invariably happens to be the leader of the Party with the majority in the elected House, enjoys the freedom to choose his ministerial colleagues. He can select the best, admit into the Cabinet those who are equally dedicated to the new ideals, those who will have the courage to tender well-thought advice to him.

Once he has made his choice, the Prime Minister assumes a new role. He has to weld the Cabinet into a composite whole. He has to provide, at Cabinet meetings, ample freedom for the ministers to express their views freely and frankly. Honest difference of opinion on plans and priorities and strategies should be encouraged.

Every issue that will vitally affect the course of the nation's progress must be analysed threadbare and then decisions taken. These decisions, once taken after mature consideration of all the available options bind down the entire Cabinet.

The style of implementation of the decisions, however, is left to the individual ministers. And so long as they don't veer away from the goal, so long as they do not fail to harness their officials and resources to accelerate the pace of progress, the Prime Minister has nothing much to do except to seek occasional progress reports from his ministers.

This is the ideal state of Cabinet functioning. This does not give any overlordship to the Prime Minister over other Cabinet ministers. He is the cohesive force. His success depends on how he leads without making the members of the Cabinet feel that they are being led.

It would have taken a super-human being to be this ideal Prime Minister, especially one who had to chart a course across the harsh waters of economic, social and political backwardness of the nation. Impatience at delay in results, annoyance over conventional approach and unimaginative implementation, and above all, the conviction that he knew best what was good for the masses—all these added up to a wide gulf between ideals and reality.

It was this cleavage that became evident in Pandit Nehru's approach to the high office he held. He arrogated to himself the right to interfere in the workings of the various wings of the Government. Thus, he violated the elementary principle of good and effective Cabinet functioning.

Most of the Cabinet colleagues, dwarfed by his towering personality, surrendered their individualities and chose the path of least resistance. They forgot that rivers and men begin to meander and drift, when they submit to stronger forces.

If they had stood up to him boldly, demarcated the parameters of their rights, and stalled him when he tried to undermine the nature of joint Cabinet responsibility so that it would become nothing more than a facade for a one-man show, our democracy would have moved in a different direction. In the initial stages, Nehru was still accommodating, willing to consider suggestions. He was still ready to pay heed to the needs of democracy and to

suppress his natural autocratic bent of mind. But, his Cabinet colleagues, at least the majority of them, found it safer and simpler to be his 'yes men'.

Therein lay one of the major reasons for the growth of authoritarianism.

Inevitably, among a gathering of varied individuals, there were a few bold souls in the Cabinet who stood upto this colossus. So long as they were there, there was hope of fulfilment for the infant Indian democracy. But, as they either died or were pushed out into the limbo of oblivion by political forces, Pandit Nehru became a law unto himself. He retained all the external frills and formalities of democracy. But, behind the facade sat the democratic dictator.

It was his mistaken notion of the Prime Minister's powers which led him into a tussle with Sardar Patel, who was his deputy.

Inadvertently, Pandit Nehru raised a hornet's nest when he directed his private Secretary, H.V.R. Iengar, to depute for him, (originally, the Prime Minister was to undertake the trip, but there was a last minute cancellation), and to visit Ajmer to make an on-the-spot study of the communal riots there.

When Sardar Patel came to know about it, he became furious. He saw in it a dangerous trend as he interpreted it as a naked encroachment on his department. If the Prime Minister had undertaken the visit, Patel would have found nothing in it to complain. But the very idea that a civil servant, however competent and efficient he be, could enjoy the powers of reviewing the progress of his department struck him as a grave misdemeanour. If the move was not checked in time, it would become an established convention and add a new dimension to the powers wielded by the Prime Minister. The assumption of total power would only be a few steps away.

Determined to arrest this dangerous trend, Sardar Patel wrote to Pandit Nehru, protesting against the deputation of Iengar to study the law and order situation at Ajmer.

The Prime Minister, however, scotched the interpretation lent to the visit by Patel. He said that he had not exceeded his

powers, that he had acted in accordance with the demands of the time, that if he surrendered this right, he would become 'a prisoner without the freedom to act in accordance with what I might consider the needs of the situation.'

In his counter to the plea of Nehru, Patel observed :

"You seem to feel that my action in explaining what I consider to be the probable consequence of any action taken by you regarding matters which fall within my ministerial responsibility or in venturing to question the propriety or soundness of any action which ignores or affects such responsibility results in restraining or constraining your liberty or freedom which you consider necessary for the due discharge of your responsibility, I am afraid I cannot subscribe to this view."

The views taken by Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel were diametrically opposite to each other. There was no common ground. The Prime Minister carried the impression that he had not stepped beyond the scope of the powers vested in him. The Sardar, equally firmly, clung on to the plea that the entire episode reflected a sort of overlordship by the Prime Minister which was inconsistent with proper democratic norms.

Their conflict was finally presented to the Mahatma.

Explaining his stand, Pandit Nehru wrote :

"As I conceive it, the Prime Minister's role is and should be an important role. He is not only a figure-head, but a person who should be more responsible than anyone else in the general trend of the policy and for the coordination of the work of the various government departments. The final authority necessarily is the Cabinet. But in the type of democratic set-up we have adopted, the Prime Minister is supposed to play an outstanding role. This, I think, is important as otherwise there will be no cohesion in the Cabinet and the government and disruptive tendencies will be at work.... As Prime Minister I have a special function to perform which covers all the Ministries and the Departments and indeed every aspect of governmental authority.

This function cannot be defined and the proper discharge of it depends a great deal on the spirit of co-operation animating all the parties concerned. Inevitably, in discharging this function of Prime Minister, I have to deal with every Ministry not as head of one particular Ministry, but as a coordinator and a kind of supervisor... The immediate issue arose out of my sending Iengar to Ajmer... Is the Prime Minister entitled to take such a step and who is to (be the) judge of this ? If the Prime Minister cannot even take this step and is not himself to be the judge of what is proper and what is not in such matters, then he cannot function properly or fulfil his functions. Indeed, he does not function at all as the Prime Minister should.”

Sardar Patel rebutted the contention of Pandit Nehru. He presented his interpretation of the question of the powers which should be reposed in the Prime Minister, asking Gandhiji to judge the issue on merit.

“I have found myself unable to agree with the conception of the Prime Minister’s duties and functions. That conception, if accepted, would raise the Prime Minister to the position of a virtual dictator. This, in my opinion, is wholly opposed to democratic and Cabinet system of government. The Prime Minister’s position, according to my concept, is certainly pre-eminent ; he is the first among equals. But, he has no over-riding powers over his colleagues ; if he had any, a Cabinet and Cabinet responsibility would be superfluous. In my view, the Prime Minister, as the leader of the Party and the head of the whole administration is inevitably concerned that Cabinet decisions are effective and that there is no conflict between one Ministry and another. But the entire responsibility for implementing the policy of the government rests with the Ministers and the Ministries under them which are concerned with the subject matter of the Cabinet decisions. He has accordingly the right to ask for information from the Minister concerned as well as the right to consult and advise on the lines of policy to be adopted

and even the manner in which the policy is to be implemented. But the responsibility for the policy must be that of the Ministry concerned and the Minister in charge and the Prime Minister should influence action by way of consultation with and advice to the Ministers. I am sure the position of the Prime Minister not only fully safeguards his pre-eminence and makes him an effective head of the administration, but is also fully in accord with done principles and rules of Ministry and Cabinet responsibility... As regards Iengar's visit... the question is not whether the Prime Minister was entitled to take this step or not, or whether he is not to be the judge of the propriety of the action, but whether I, as a Minister, was wrong in pointing out to him the inadvisability of the course he has taken and the probable consequence entailed."

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, at a time when the two most powerful forces in the Cabinet had arrayed themselves in a confrontation over the question of the powers of the Prime Minister *vis-a-vis* the members of the Cabinet and readied themselves for a parting of ways, had a salutary effect. Both realised that they should adjust and accommodate and work together for national unity and cohesion. They sank their differences. But, there was no rapport in their dealings, no real fusion of hearts. They differed from each other in every respect, in their attitudes, credos, beliefs, ideas and ideals. What kept them together was their nascent patriotism. Nehru gave the other complete freedom to chart the course which broadly fitted in with the national policy decided by the Cabinet. He did not interfere in the day-to-day working of the Ministries under Patel's charge. He scrupulously refrained from any action that might be construed as a deliberate attempt to provoke Sardar Patel. But such restraints deflated Nehru's natural bounce. It corroded the already weak links which bound him to Patel. Never close to each other, the wedge between the two widened.

Pandit Nehru had met his match in the Sardar.

But with other members of his Cabinet, the Prime Minister continued to exercise his authority with a thin veneer of constitu-

tional propriety. In the beginning, there were some Cabinet colleagues who found the situation stultifying. They fought against the excessive concentration of power. They revolted against fetters and controls imposed on them. They struggled, vainly, against the bonds which crippled their natural style of functioning.

John Mathai resigned from the Central Cabinet 'over the question of governmental control on expenditure.' As the Finance Minister, he assumed that he would have the final say on matters of allocation of funds and their utilisation by various wings of the Government within the broad framework of policies evolved by the Cabinet. He noted, after his resignation :

"There is at present a general tendency among the Ministers to disregard the authority of the Standing Finance Committee and to adopt proposals of expenditure either without or in anticipation of its approval. Some greatest offenders in this respect are the Ministries functioning under the immediate control of the Prime Minister.....When the High Commissioner in London was appointed Ambassador in Ireland, the Standing Finance Committee agreed on the understanding that there should be no expenditure other than the travelling expenditure. There was to be no building and no staff. This was agreed to by the External Affairs Ministry as a part of our economy campaign... ...It has now been decided by the Cabinet that the High Commissioner should be provided with a building and staff.....this without the approval of the Standing Finance Committee and against its recommendations."

These two instances indicate the attention paid by Pandit Nehru to the evolution of proper conventions and traditions to govern the basic idea of collective Cabinet responsibility. As Krishna Menon, one of Pandit Nehru's close associates, noted, 'The Prime Minister did not steamroll, but he got his own way or got one or other of his colleagues to give way.' Naturally, most of his Cabinet colleagues who owed their positions to him 'fell back on him for guidance and support even on trivial matters.' They did not demur when he took decisions and then took the Cabinet into

confidence. They did not assert their rights to be heard and consulted before decisions were taken. They did not raise any protest when some aspect or other of vital importance to the nation was handled by Pandit Nehru, through his own channels of operation, while the Cabinet was kept completely in the dark about the moves. The Cabinet was there, more like a rubber stamp which endorsed the decisions that their mentor sought. Thus, the outer shell of the Cabinet looked lustrous and dynamic, yet deep within, there was nothing tangible or strong about it.

Only those who fitted into this pattern of functioning were preferred. Others who clung on to the concept of collective responsibility and ministerial rights ran headlong into trouble. Ambedkar found that 'he was being bypassed and his talent was not being properly utilised.' C.D. Deshmukh left the Cabinet when he espied 'lack of collective deliberations and decisions.' V.V Giri had a confrontation with Nehru over the issue of alteration of the award of the tribunal which went into the dispute between the management of banks and their employees.

These instances were few and far between. But they gave an inkling of the processing of democracy under the tutelage of Pandit Nehru. The Caesar in him was finding full scope for expression. In his pursuit of absolute power, he was aided and abetted by his colleagues. Instead of a firm protest at every minor violation of the basic rule of Cabinet consultation, they chose the easy way out. They left it to the discretion of Pandit Nehru to decide the path of democratic evolution. They had negated their individuality, and acted as if they were there only to carry out, obediently, the directives of their master.

However, not all of them were men of straw. There were trusted men, who had won public applause by their daring deeds during the national struggle. But even these stalwarts lost their natural composure and confidence in the presence of Pandit Nehru. They stood in awe of him, realised the danger latent in any confrontation with him, no matter how strong their conviction, and preferred to placate him with their docility and tractability.

Those who accepted the pecking order and yielded to the authority of the Prime Minister thrived. They turned into his devotees. They atrophied, over a period of time, into competent

sycophants. Their quest for survival sapped their will to safeguard the interests of the masses. Gradually they became misfits. Yet they survived. This provided a brand new Indian maxim which went against the universally accepted concept. It gave the right to survive to the least fit.

Nehru was guided by the same zest for absolute power while evolving the conventions which, more than the Constitutional provisos, would define the role of the President. He wanted the President to enjoy a status similar to that accorded to the British monarch.

The framers of the Indian Constitution had taken much from the British Constitution. The powers and privileges of the British Monarchy had been taken into account while drafting the relevant clauses pertaining to the powers which the President should enjoy. But the founding fathers did not duplicate *verbatim* the British Monarchy. They certainly did not visualise the office of the President to be just an ornamental one, shorn of all real powers. They rejected the plea made by some members, during the discussions on 14th October, 1949, for some proviso binding the President to accept the advice of the Council of Ministers. They thus gave an indication of what they had in mind. They wanted a dynamic, active, independent President who could steer clear of purely political considerations and lend to all national issues a broader perspective. To achieve this, the framers of the Constitution widened the base of the electoral college. Not only were the members of the Parliament entitled to vote, but the members of the state legislatures too had a say in deciding who should be Head of State and thus become the First Citizen of India and the Commander-in-Chief of all the three Defence Services.

It was, therefore, a mistake when a determined campaign was begun to create the impression that the President of India was modelled on the British Monarchy and enjoyed no powers other than those which were enjoyed on the British Monarchy.

The differences between the Indian Presidentship and the British Monarchy have been brought out by H.N. Pandit in his book, *The PM's President, A New Concept on Trial*. He records :

“(1) The British Monarch receives his crown from above according to the rules of heredity while the Indian President is elevated from below by the people’s choice

(2) Historically, the British Monarch has been in existence for many centuries while the Indian President has been brought into existence as a state functionary by the Indian Constitution. If he is regarded as a titular head only without any function, there can be no justification for the creation of the Presidentship. The British Monarch stands on a different footing. In his country the ancient institution of Monarchy has existed for centuries and has not been abolished for reasons of tradition and popular sentiment.

(3) The British Monarch’s historical role was in conflict with the interests of the people whereas the Indian President holds his office to serve the interests of the people, because he himself comes from among the people. Hence, there can be no justification for equating him with, say, a descendant of Charles I of England.

(4) The British Monarch represents no one except his dynasty, whereas the elected Indian President is a representative of the people of the whole country of India. Indeed, his electoral base is much wider than even that of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister enjoys the confidence of the majority of the Lok Sabha only whereas the President is elected by all the elected legislatures of this country.

(5) In Britain even Parliament cannot remove a Monarch while in India under our Constitution, a President can be impeached and removed from his office for gross misdemeanour. This makes the President responsible for his acts and omissions. This responsibility obviously cannot be the responsibility to stay inert without functioning.

(6) The British Monarch exists independently of the likes

and dislikes of the political parties. The Constitution places him beyond the reach of the parties, the Cabinet and Parliament. This ensures a dignity of his own even when he is without actual power. But an Indian President can be, and in fact is, sponsored by political parties. He owes his office to them and is dependent on them for re-election at the end of his five-year term. He can also be punished on the insistence of the dominant political party. Actual power alone can compensate for the total absence of independent dignity of his status. If he has no power, there is hardly any other state functionary whose position is as pitiable as that of the Head of the State. Besides, in Great Britain, taking away the powers of the King was necessary to make the will of the people prevail. The same thing cannot be said about the Indian President."

Pandit Nehru, perhaps, did not make an earnest attempt to understand and appreciate fully the role which the founding fathers had in their minds when they drafted the Constitution and created the office of the President. He carried the impression that he, as Prime Minister, enjoyed unlimited powers. The President only provided the 'ceremonial seal by which the nation's decisions are made known.'

This interpretation of the President's inactive, docile role was questioned by Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of Independent India. He declined to accept the argument that the office he held bore an unwavering parallel to the British Monarchy. He had been the President of the Constitutional Assembly, and had actively participated in its discussions and debates. He had probed into the very core of each clause which finally went into the Constitution. He knew that the President was expected to be above party loyalties. Elected on a national base, he should be a nobler being, above petty political bickerings, and command the respect and regard of the whole nation. He should enjoy the right to speak freely and frankly on all issues with the Government. He should, in brief, be an active participant in the forum of decision-making ; not a mere rubber stamp. Only thus could he truly ensure the

strength and viability of the Indian democracy.

Pandit Nehru, however, refused to accept this view. The President tried to influence the Prime Minister through normal channels of communications. He asserted his will, refused to bow down to the directive of Pandit Nehru not to attend the funeral of Sardar Patel in December 1950, at Bombay. He rejected the advice of Pandit Nehru, and held on firm to his religious beliefs. He pulled up Krishna Menon for keeping him in the dark over the controversy around the resignation of General Thimmayya.

There were other issues, including the Hindu Code Bill, on which the President stepped in rather abrasively and asserted his right to be heard.

However, Dr Rajendra Prasad was too much of a patriot to bring the differences between him and his Prime Minister out into the open. He restrained himself to the limits of legal channels available to him. But he had little or no elbow room because of the invisible strings of the dignity and propriety of this office. He could only pace restlessly in the gilded cage in which he found himself. He reached the end of his tether when he analysed the growing power of Pandit Nehru and the consequent erosion of the quality of the men who surrounded him. He made a bold bid to bring out the issue which nagged him and to seek a national debate on the role of the President. In his address to the Law Institute on 28th November 1960, he sought a probe into the powers of the President. He said :

"It is generally believed that like the Sovereign of Great Britain, the President is also a constitutional head and has to act according to the advice of his Council of Ministers. The executive power of the Union is vested in the President and shall be exercised by him directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with the Constitution. The Supreme Command of the Defence Forces is also vested in him and in exercise thereof shall be regulated by law. There are in the articles of the Constitution many provisions which lay down specific duties and functions of the President. The

question I should like to be studied and investigated is the extent to which and the matters in respect of which, if any, the powers and functions of the President differ from those of the Sovereign of the Great Britain. Further, it may also be considered if the procedure by which the President is elected and is liable to be removed or impeached introduces any difference, constitutionally speaking, between the President and the British Monarch. Generally what are the points in respect of which the powers and functions of the two are the same and what are the points if any and the extent to which they differ. In this connection it may be pointed out that there is no provision in the Constitution which in so many words lays down that the President shall be bound to act in accordance with the advice of his Council of Ministers ...In this connection a wider question of much importance is how far we are entitled to invoke and incorporate into our written Constitution by interpretation the conventions of the British Constitution which is an unwritten Constitution ?”

The issue, raised by the President at a public forum, however, did not receive wide publicity. Pandit Nehru intervened. He ensured that copies of the speech of the President were not made available to the people. He sensed that a wide and free study of the Constitution in a search for the answers to the various questions raised by the President would strike at the base of his power. He held fast the interpretation that the President should be a dignified, non-controversial, ornate official acting in consonance with his Council of Ministers. Since the Council was under his control, Nehru visualised tacit control over the President too by exploiting the accepted notion that the latter was bound down by the advice given to him by the Cabinet.

It was a bitter potion for Dr Rajendra Prasad. He had tried out the last option and he was checkmated. He realised that any attempt on his part to force the issue would create a very complex situation. It might even impair the stability of the new democracy. So, he resigned himself to his position. In this, he was also influenced by the deep and abiding love he had for Pandit Nehru.

And, may be, he was also guided by the realisation that he was not equal to the charismatic hold of the Prime Minister on the people. Yet, he had one satisfaction. He had tried to clarify the situation. He had set his case before the elite of the legal profession. If they did not take the cue, if they did not live up to the demands of democracy, the blame would rest squarely on them.

His quest for a clear enunciation of the role of the President failed due to the indifference of the intellectuals to this very vital issue. This outcome of the situation had a far-reaching effect. The President's failure to find a proper balance of power between himself and the Prime Minister augmented the office of the Prime Minister. By convention, it became obligatory on the part of the President to abide by the advice of his Council of Ministers.

Dr Radhakrishnan, who succeeded Dr Rajendra Prasad as President, soon learnt that all the high-flown words of praise showered on him by Pandit Nehru did not in any way empower him to play a major role in the conduct of the affairs of the State. He had assumed the office, hoping to influence Pandit Nehru and to lead him along on at least some matters on which he thought he could offer sensible directions. It soon became apparent to the philosopher-statesman that his fond hopes were built on false presumptions. After repeated failures in making his impact on the policy-making forum, the President wailed : "What is the President after all ? Anyone who is nearing seventy-five and has lost his own will-power is fit enough to be the President of India."

It was to such a pathetic state that the office of the President of India was reduced. The first two Presidents tried, ineffectually, to lend some power to the high office they held. But they had to contend with a more determined and stern politician who held the office of the Prime Minister and who spared no efforts to concentrate all powers in his person. In this struggle, the odds were in favour of Pandit Nehru. He had endeared himself to the masses. He exuded the confidence reposed in him by them. His charisma created an aura of invincibility around him.

Pandit Nehru was not content with the taming of the President and the Cabinet colleagues. Of course, these conquests made him master of the governmental machinery. However, he could not resist the temptation to have a whip hand over the Congress Party

in whose name he held the office of Prime Minister. His efforts in this direction too followed the familiar path and ended with the consummation of his hope to be the one and only source of authority.

It began immediately after the death of Sardar Patel in 1950. The prime target of this move was Purushottam Das Tandon, the President of the Indian National Congress. He provided the red rag for the Prime Minister. His election to the high office, despite Nehru's tacit opposition to his candidature, was a sore that had not healed. Pandit Nehru and his followers had pitted Acharya Kripalani against Tandon. But the weight thrown by Sardar Patel and his adherents had tilted the scale in favour of Tandon. Tandon had polled 1,306 votes. The Acharya had to be content with 1,052 votes.

There was nothing that Pandit Nehru could do to stall the assumption of the Presidentship of the Party by one with whom he could see eye to eye. Nehru viewed Tandon as a rightist, a Hindu revivalist, and hence a reactionary. It was an image which by and large had been lent to those who stood behind the Sardar. It was an image against which high-flown radical ideas could be let loose.

It is difficult to identify how far Nehru was guided by political considerations in the move to ease Tandon out of this office. The nation was due to go to the polls in the spring of 1952. To leave the selection of candidates who would stand on the Party's ticket from various constituencies to the Congress President who was not tuned to the same wave length as the Prime Minister, argued the Nehruites, might lead to the induction into the Parliament of men who did not share the hopes, "dreams and ambitions of Pandit Nehru. This was one of the plausible reasons behind the move. But there was also the invisible, but nonetheless a powerful force which led to the conflict between the Party's President and the Prime Minister. This force emerged from Nehru's latent zest for complete and unquestioned power.

In July 1951, at the All India Congress Committee meeting, the Nehruites demanded that the Prime Minister should assume the office of the Party President. This was a proposal which went against the accepted concept that the two offices should not be combined in one person. Many a time Pandit Nehru had reiterated

that 'it would not be proper for the Prime Minister to be the Congress President.' But such declarations symbolised nothing. They were rules laid down by a master to his followers. They did not, in any way bind the master.

While the bandwagon was raising much din and fury, preparing the stage, Pandit Nehru fired the first volley by demanding that the Working Committee should be reconstituted. He also wanted the Central Election Committee to be strengthened with some change in members. Tandon struggled, ineffectually, against these moves. He saw, in the moves, a strategy aimed at taking away the freedom that the Party President enjoyed to have, in his executive council, those in whom he could place complete confidence. He sensed, rightly, how any compromise on these issues would leave him a titular head.

That was the last thing that Tandon wanted. He preferred to leave the post rather than cling on to it, allowing Pandit Nehru to control the real levers of power. That was the only option available to him. He suggested that he, along with his Working Committee, would resign. Then Pandit Nehru could do what he willed with the Party.

The proposal shook Nehru. It struck a discordant note in him. He opened his eyes, temporarily though, to the need to yield to the pressures of democratic norms in the Party. He did not want to sully his name with such a blatantly undemocratic act. He withdrew his demand. His pride was mollified by a unity resolution passed by the Party.

The resolution signified nothing. It did not heal the wounds caused by the rupture and in no way could assuage the feelings of the opposite camps. It just stalled the crisis, temporarily.

The spark for the inevitable explosion was provided by the threat of resignation held out by Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and Ajit Prasad Jain. They forwarded their resignations from the Party and the Cabinet and unleashed an attack on the Party leadership. They noted :

"Is there a parallel in the world where the executive head, i.e., the President of an organisation is the very antithesis of everything that the organisation stands for ? What is there in common between Purushottam Das Tandon and the policies

of the Congress—economic, communal, international and/or refugees ? Even at this juncture when our ways have parted, we wished and hoped that the working of the Congress should fall in line with its profession.”

The threat of resignation by his close confidants shook Nehru out of his reverie. He had reconciled himself to the continuance of Tandon as the Congress President, but was not ready to give up his right to have, in his Cabinet, men in whom he placed absolute confidence. He pleaded with Kidwai and Jain to continue in office, even though they ceased to be the members of the Congress Party :

Tandon reacted to this subtle move which was a blow to the hold of the Party over its Prime Minister. He wrote to Nehru :

“I am very doubtful if the Prime Minister could have agreed to this arrangement for this would create an impossible position...The Prime Minister and his Cabinet are responsible to the Congress and have to carry out policies laid down by the Congress from time to time.”

Once again, the legality of Tandon’s stand assailed Nehru. However much he liked to strike out on his own, he had to maintain the semblance of Party discipline. Reluctantly, he accepted the resignations of his two colleagues.

It was a bitter pill for Nehru to swallow. It raised his pique. In his characteristic manner, he reacted by sending his resignation from the Congress Working Committee and from the Central Election Committee. He argued : “I am convinced that I do not fit into the Working Committee and I am not in tune with it.”

Nehru’s resignation letter was a blow to Tandon. He pleaded with Nehru to reconsider his stand. He pointed out the damage that the Party would suffer if Nehru disassociated himself from the Party forum.

Nehru, in his reply to Tandon, expressed his misgivings :

“I have long been distressed at the attitude of some persons which indicated that they wished to drive others from the Congress who did not fit in with their views or general out-

look... I feel that the Congress is rapidly drifting from its moorings and more and more the wrong kind of people, rather the people who have the wrong kind of ideas, are gaining influence in it."

Tandon found himself caught in a mess, not of his creation, but foisted on him by his opponents. He wilted under pressure. He had enough to realise that if it came to a clash, Nehru would walk away with the prize catch while he would be dropped into the limbo of disgrace. He saw only one way out of the tangle. He would quit rather than lead the Party down a blind alley. He did not, however, want to abrogate his powers or that of the Working Committee. He was firmly convinced that the Party forum was superior to the Government, that the Government was only expected to implement the basic policies approved by the Party.

Much behind-the-scenes confabulations and mediations and compromise formulas failed to settle the conflict. Finally, Tandon resigned the office of the President of the Congress. He declared, 'Pandit Nehru is not an ordinary member of the Working Committee. He represents the nation more than any individual today.'

Thus ended the crisis that threatened to split the Party. It ended like a storm in a tea-cup.

Pandit Nehru assumed the Presidentship of the Congress. He held the office till December 1954. Often, he spoke about the inadvisability of combining the Party post with the Governmental post. His statements only brought forth a cacophony of sounds from his docile followers that his presence at the leading position in the Party and in the Government was essential to the nation's interest. These reiterations pleased Nehru.

When he finally relinquished the Party post, he inducted U.N. Dhebar, a political lightweight from Rajkot. On assuming office, Dhebar defined his understanding of his role :

"There is only one leader in India today and that is Pandit Nehru. Whether he carries the mantle of the Congress President on his shoulders or not, ultimately the whole country looks to him for support and guidance."

The President of the Party was no longer an independent entity in the political reckoning. He had the freedom to play around with minor disputes in the Party, to initiate discussions on theoretical aspects of rejuvenating the Party or of lending to it ideological masks. But the issues that really counted were decided by the Prime Minister, and his decisions were endorsed automatically. To keep up the facade of the Party's authority over the Government, issues were debated at length at Party forums. Critical notes were struck. Strident voices rang out against the trend and content of administration. But, these were symbolic sounding of cymbals. They had little or no strength latent in them, at least not enough to fight against the omnipotent, omniscient perorations of the master who held unfettered control over all wings of the Government and the Party.

Inevitably, the natural flow of democracy where policies are decided by the Party, which has the majority in Parliament and therefore is in power, got reversed. Instead of policies and programmes being decided by the Party and fed to the Government for implementation, the Government began to evolve strategies and schemes and imposed them on the Party with immunity. Gradually, the party became subservient to the Government. There was only one potentate whose personality and influence was felt by everyone, whose impact could be sensed everywhere. That potentate was Pandit Nehru.

He identified the Government with the Party. He left it to his daughter to take one more step, to identify the Government with the Party and the Party with the nation before identifying herself with India.

Those who showed independence of thought, those who differed with Pandit Nehru and refused to give up their convictions, soon found themselves edged out of the Party. They were condemned, castigated, crowned with all choice epithets that could be added to one who attempts to swim against the stream. They found themselves in the political wilderness. Only those who pleased the master and placated him, turned themselves into robots programmed to fit in with Pandit Nehru's concepts, shared the splendour of office.

Such a situation was brought about by Pandit Nehru by subtly

exploiting his political acumen. Dealing with this aspect of Nehru's mind, Frank Moraes noted :

"Nehru was not without shrewdness or guile. Like Franklin D. Roosevelt, he had something of the lion and the fox in him and none understood better the mechanics and manipulations of Indian politics."

Deft manipulations of political machinery made him exceptionally powerful. He got transferred into a strange being, a man with democratic instincts, savouring almost absolute power. He became a democratic Caesar and thus an anachronism. Few people realised how dangerous this transformation of a democrat into a near dictator was, how seriously it would impair the future of democracy, how subtly it would attenuate and alter the character and complexion of Indian administration and Party functioning, how it would prepare the ground for the gradual growth of authoritarianism. Their warning notes were lost in the notes of adulation, struck by camp-followers and self-seekers who wriggled into the set up, and became cogs in the wheels of power. These sycophants transformed a basically incorruptible man into the patron saint of the corrupt and confirmed a significant footnote to the elements of history—power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

## TWO

# Shield for the Corrupt

Greatness of achievements demands greatness of motivation. Leaders of people cannot move forward without a well-crystallised philosophy of life and a sense of purpose. The mind of a leader, well accustomed to movement much above the mundane plane of other morals, can readily accommodate the nobility of its purpose. Perhaps nothing is nobler as a motivation than love, be it any of its numerous forms.

It was love for power that provided the sheet anchor for Nehru's rule. He assumed that so long as he kept himself above corrupt practices, all would be well with the nation. Of course, Nehru exhibited exceptional moral rectitude. Inspired by patriotism, he worked assiduously for the evolution of a new social order where true democracy would function and flourish. He dreamt of a society where economic and social equalities would be real and tangible.

His quest for this goal was his driving force.

The task he had set for himself was one which he could not complete by himself. He sought the support of his comrades who were tied with bonds of personal loyalty to him. He assumed that the men chosen by him would also be endowed with the same spirit of national love. He believed that they would scrupulously be honest and would not yield to the temptations which go with power. He failed to realise the influence which power would exert on his close associates. Many of them did not have the mental will and the firm determination to resist the temptations which form an inevitable appendage to power. But their weakness lay concealed. They had never been exposed to power before. They

had been on the periphery of the national struggle, if not at the centre of the liberation movement. It was their patriotism which won them a ringside seat in Nehru's citadel of power. He loved them, saw only their good points, but did not judge their inherent weaknesses. This failure on the part of Nehru cost the nation heavily in the years to come.

Nehru exploited his confidants to gain an octopus-like hold over the levers of power. He argued that he was seeking power to do good to the country.

Quest for excessive power prepared the scenario for corruption to thrive.

With confidence, Nehru defined the policies which would bring relief to the masses. He exhorted his colleagues to implement the policies which he had set out before them. He drove them around, eager to take the nation faster towards the lofty goals he had in mind.

Certainly about the wisdom of his stance injected into the political system restraints and cramps, introduced controls, both legislative and otherwise, negated the accepted dictum, 'that government governs the best which governs the least.'

Pandit Nehru, as Janardhan Thakur noted, 'was honest and great but he was no saint. He had his weaknesses. He liked, or at least bore with, fawning courtiers. Under his large umbrella thrived Dharam Tejas and Kairons and a host of shady characters.'

Thus, his determination to lead the country towards economic and social liberty got watered down by the very men through whom he tried to give shape to his ideas. He loved those who were close to him. He loved the pleasantries and platitudes they mouthed to keep him in good humour. Their adulations fanned his ego, their utter docility boosted his pride.

He returned the docility and pliability of the men who clustered around him and placed absolute confidence in them. He appreciated the readiness with which they surrendered their individualities and bore the cloaks he designed for them. They all looked identical, very much like the backs of the cards in a pack. One critic even dubbed the Cabinet a pack of cards... a pack of

cards with only one ace—Nehru.

He nurtured the belief that he was a good judge of men. He could not admit even to himself, that the men who had enjoyed his confidence were not all paragons of virtue. There were some who had feet of clay ; some others who eagerly dipped into every pie to which they had access ; a few more who showed exceptional ineptitude in handling the nation's limited resources. Yet, they were safe and secure. For they enjoyed the protection of Nehru. He would never disown them so long as they remained loyal to him.

Nehru, thus, became the shield for the corrupt. He pulled on blinkers so that he could not see their failings. They remained, in his view, honest, selfless, incorruptible, brimming with the zest to do good to the nation. He placed national loyalty at par with personal loyalty ; nay, he put national loyalty behind personal loyalty.

This concept of personal loyalty cut across the interests of the nation. It gradually eroded the very essence of high moral rectitude which alone strengthens and sustains democracy. It became the albatross round the neck of free India. It provided the screen behind which the minions in Nehru's camp worked feverishly to serve their personal interests, to misuse power and possession, and thus to enrich themselves and to clench in their tentacles the levers of political power.

The nation would have been better served had Nehru visualised the danger latent in their faith in his followers. He should have seen the pitfalls in his path. He should have firmly and ruthlessly driven out of power those who, in the first few years of power at the helm of free India, showed how corrupt they could become. Such an action would have helped the evolution of a healthy tradition. Corruption would have been contained, if not eliminated. If a few of his colleagues, who had debased themselves and pampered their personal whims and fancies, had been pushed out into the political wilderness or pulled up at the bar of the nation, parliamentary democracy would not have degenerated into a veritable chaos of nefarious practices and unscrupulous lust for power.

A good beginning, it is said, goes a long way towards success. Free India did not get a good start, at least not in the direction of laying down proper norms to contain corruption. Corruption slowly raised its ugly head, and in a short duration, assumed grave proportions. It became a way of life in India.

Rumours surfaced, rumours about corruption among the big-wigs. Often these rumours reached the ears of Nehru too. But, he mistook most of these rumours as political mud-slinging. He parried and tarried every time there was a clamour for enquiry. He watered down the very nature of the enquiry which he reluctantly initiated. He ensured that no serious dent would be made in the armour of his protege temporarily under a cloud. He acted as if he was more keen to give a clean chit to his associates than to delve into the aberrations and to find out their true reasons. He was the king who could do no wrong.

It was inevitable, under such setting, that corruption spread its tentacles over all areas of national activities. There was mounting pressure from some quarters to contain the menace. As a sop to their demands, the Planning Commission, in 1951, asked Mr. Gorewala, an eminent administrator, (presently Editor, *Opinion* a magazine that puts in the dock the mightiest in the land) to recommend measures to stem the rot. His report read :

“Parliamentary government is in its infancy in the country. Accordingly, this is the proper time to lay down and observe conventions so that with the passage of years they may consolidate into traditions which those who come hereafter will accept instinctively, knowing that, based as they are on the wisdom of their fathers, they will serve their turn well..... It is not surprising that when grave allegations by responsible parties are made against people holding positions of high authority and they remain in power without being cleared of the accusations, the public feel that the influentials always escape punishment..... Arrangements must be made that no one, however highly placed, is immune from enquiry if allegations against him are made by responsible parties and a *prima facie* case exists..... The best form of machinery would be a tribunal to enquire, that is, a tribunal the purpose of

which is not to punish but to find out and establish facts. In other places such tribunals have found it possible to enquire into the conduct of the Ministers of the Crown and high government officials without in any way making it impossible for them to continue to work, and there is no reason why similar tribunals could not work satisfactorily, considering the high standard of our judiciary. All facilities for directing investigations, obtaining evidence, examining documents would have to be placed at the disposal of the tribunal. The authority responsible for setting up the tribunal might, for the Central Government, be the President, and for State Governments, the Governor acting in consultation with the President. They, in either case, on being satisfied that there was *prima facie* evidence, would appoint a tribunal. An alternative would be to vest the power of appointing such tribunals in the Supreme Court. The existence of the power would by itself have a very salutary effect on the behaviour of people holding responsible positions and power, for there can be no doubt that at the present moment, with a parliamentary majority behind them, atleast a few are inclined to hold that there is no difference between their will and the law."

These recommendations, made by Gorewala provided the tool with which a war against corruption could have been fought. The rot which had set in was still only in a primary stage, and had not yet eaten into the safe recesses of governmental machinery from where no amount of concerted attack would easily dislodge this pernicious evil. Firm and stern action at the time, when the nation was experimenting with democratic norms and gradually learning the basic lessons of parliamentary government would have established good and healthy traditions. Failures of judgement that indicated the hidden hand of corruption on the part of the close associates of the Prime Minister should have been dealt with severely. They should have been driven out of the corridors of the power, and made answerable to the laws of the country. They should have been forced to pay the penalty for their acts of commission and omission. The severity of the retributions

heaped on the elite would have deterred corrupt tendencies, helped the evolution of a feeling all around that none, however big and mighty he be, could escape nemesis.

Nehru, however, was not farsighted enough. He did not visualise that corruption formed an inevitable part of growing administrative control, that it assumed diverse shapes and forms, that its unfettered growth would undermine the democratic set-up. He mistook every attack on one member or other of his entourage as an attack on him. He believed that interested parties were maligning his colleagues. He thought they wanted to isolate him and to weaken him. This was the logic which helped the growth of corruption. This was the attitude which created an impression, all round, that one could get away with anything if he had the right contacts. This was accepted as the normal order of things when Pandit Nehru scoffed at those who shouted themselves hoarse over the mounting corruption. He said :

“There is hardly a day when I do not see some headline about corruption and ineptitude of Government..... I think quite honestly, this conception of widespread corruption in the Government is totally wrong. Not that there is no corruption in the Government ; but. ... I am prepared to compare my country with other countries of the world. There are very few which are better off in this respect and a vast majority are infinitely worse.”

Instead of taking up the cause of integrity and rectitude in public affairs, the Prime Minister thought the easy way out by grossly underplaying the impact of corruption. Thus, he set the scenario for corruption to grow wild and to assume massive proportions.

The first instance of grave misuse of power was provided by the Indian High Commission in London, headed by V.K. Krishna Menon, in 1948. The manner in which it handled the purchase of jeeps and ammunitions for the Indian Army underlined the symptoms of inefficiency and incompetence, a complete lack of fiscal propriety and legal formalities.

The sudden outbreak of hostility with Pakistan, consequent to

the massive intrusion of tribals, supported by the Pakistani army, across the border into Kashmir, had sent the officials at the Army Headquarters into a flurry of activity. The difficult terrain over which the military operations had to be carried out brought home the need to own a fleet of jeeps to negotiate the mountainous roads. The Defence Ministry estimated the need of the Army at 4,603 jeeps. They procured about one-fourth of this requirement from the US.

It was at this stage that the Indian High Commission entered the picture. They studied the British market and placed an order in July 1948, with Messrs Anti-Mistantes for the supply of 2,000 jeeps. It was further stated that that company would send for three years, spares for the jeep. The terms of payment and shipment were clearly defined. The firm agreed to commence supply within six weeks from the date of order and to complete the despatch of the entire quantity within five months. In turn, the Indian Government affirmed that 65% of the cost would be paid to the firm on receipt of certificates from the inspecting firm another 20% on production of bill of lading and the remaining 15% within one month of the receipt of jeeps at a specified port in India.

There was nothing on the surface to indicate how seriously the transaction would affect the nation's interest. None was aware—or if any one was, he chose to keep silent—of one vital aspect regarding the deal—financial viability of the firm. None with even the basic understanding of commercial transactions would have negotiated a contract worth Rs 8 million without making a thorough probe into the financial stability of the firm to which one wanted to offer such a major contract. Yet, it was this basic error of judgement which marked the whole deal. It is not clear even today, whether the slip was deliberate or was due to sheer ineptitude. Either way, it cost the nation heavily.

The concern to which the big contract was offered had very little financial liquidity. It had capital assets of the magnificent value of £605.'

This by itself would not have proved a great drain on the country's resource position but for the readiness with which the High Commission agreed to a request from the firm for payment of the 65% of the cost even before certificates could be procured from

the inspecting firm. There was no need for such a concession to the firm. It was a negation of the stipulation in this regard in the contract. The hidden hand of one Mr Potter was seen, not then but much later, in the dubious transaction. With 65% of the total cost safely in hand, the firm supplied 155 unserviceable jeeps in March 1949, nearly three months after peace had been restored in Kashmir Valley, and then quietly went into liquidation.

It was Mr Potter who worked out three other deals for the Indian High Commission in London. One was a fresh agreement with the firm S.G.K. Agencies, London, for the supply of 1,007 jeeps. Another, entered into with Messrs J.C.J. Knott & Co. was for the supply of rifles and ammunitions worth £ 1,944,000. Messrs J.C.J. Knott & Co. had something in common with Anti-Mistantes. The issue capital of the company was only £ 100. A third deal related to the supply of 25 Michell bombers and for some Staghound armoured cars.

There was, of course, urgent need for the items for which the Indian High Commission negotiated contracts. The jeeps were urgently needed to transport men and materials to keep the front line in Kashmir in good trim. The rifles and the ammunitions were essential to the successful completion of the task of national defence. The bombers and the armoured cars too were essential for the conduct of the war.

But none of the items needed by the defence set-up was made available during the time of need. This by itself was a cause for concern. When it became known that precious foreign exchange had been frittered away, there was a lot of commotion in political circles. As more and more details of the losses trickled in, a wave of incredulity swept the nation. The revelation that Mr Potter had made around £ 102,000 by way of commission shocked political circles. It was evident that the nation had been taken for a ride. It was a major scandal, the first of its type, and shock waves rocked into the very foundations of the infant democracy.

There was a clamour for an enquiry into the whole affair. Nehru tried to stem the tide, hoping to overcome the demand by platitudes. But when the strident notes of Congress members in Parliament reached a crescendo, he relented, reluctantly though. He did not want to hurt the feelings of Krishna Menon whom he

held in great esteem and had pressed the British Government to accept him as the first Indian High Commissioner at London even though the Labour regime was apathetic to the proposal. He shared decades of close friendship with Menon. The two had met in 1927 when Pandit Nehru toured Europe, and then, they had fostered close ties. They kept in touch with each other, Menon staying in London and fighting the cause of India's liberation.

Their relation has been analysed by Frank Moraes :

“What drew the two men closer together ? Their backgrounds had striking similarities. Both came from families accustomed to wealth and both knew loneliness in their youth and were sensitive to the feelings and deprivations of others. In their teens, both were drawn to Theosophy, attracted not so much by its spiritual content as by its discipline and zeal to do good ..... There is a parallel again in their protracted stay in England where they were exposed to English values and ideas, leaving them with a deep-rooted antagonism for western forms of imperialism, but with a genuine affection for the English people.

.....Both separately converged on the same sheet-anchor, so called scientific socialism, and remained tethered to it and to each other despite the changing world around them.

Nehru was convinced that Krishna Menon was definitely above board. There might have been an error of judgement. But he could see nothing corrupt or clandestine or reprehensible in the conduct of his close confidant. This conviction, based on personal loyalty, attenuated the nature of enquiry made into the affair. The enquiry was left to a Congress Parliamentary Sub-committee. The conclusions of the Committee were not published.

The Public Accounts Committee picked up the case, pressed the Government to entrust the task of probing into the scandal and exploring the truth to one or two High Court judges. The Government appealed to the Public Accounts Committee not to press for a fresh enquiry by members of the judiciary. The appeal was rejected by the Public Accounts Committee. The Government then unilaterally announced that the case had been closed.

This was a big blow to democracy, a major shot in the arm of

corruption. It is immaterial, at this stage, to plead that whatever might be Menon's failings, he was personally incorruptible. But had this been tested by an impartial enquiry, and possibly the exoneration of Menon, it would have strengthened healthy traditions, created a feeling in all that the law treats everyone, high and low, as equal. By failing to lay proper base for traditional norms to be evolved, one of the major props of the nation was knocked out. Further, the cloud of suspicion about Menon's bona fides marred his chance of being accepted by the Indian political scene readily. He was later inducted into the Central Cabinet. He owed his position not to his own roots in the country, but to the support lent to him by his mentor—Nehru. Menon remained, throughout, a controversial figure whose brilliance stood out as boldly as his intolerance and pride.

Dwelling on the whole episode which is now stacked away in the annals of history under the heading, "The Jeep Scandal", Surendranath Dwivedy and G.S. Bhargava noted :

It was the first of its kind to come to light in free India. Therefore, given a principled approach on the part of Nehru, it would have helped the effective tackling of the problem of political corruption. Instead, an impression had been created that the corrupt could get away with it if they were on the right side of the rulers. The result was that more and more people took to public dishonesty almost as a policy, while mounting radical slogans and striking a leftist posture.

It was such sham postures which endeared his followers to Pandit Nehru, left them free to indulge in corrupt practices.

The next scandal which broke out with the report in the *Statesman* of 3rd August 1957, was the diversion of the funds of the life Insurance Corporation of India to a private enterprise with its headquarters in Kanpur. It echoed through the august house of Parliament a month later. The finger of accusations pointed at the Finance Minister, Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari. The clamour for a proper enquiry into the doubtful deal reverberated through the corridors of power. Nehru felt uncomfortable. He refused to believe that his Finance Minister, the person whom he

had entrusted with onerous responsibility, could ever err. But he had to keep up the facade of fairness. He agreed to the appointment of a Commission under Justice Chagla to enquire into the case. He hoped that the enquiry would indicate the innocence of the Minister, would throw the blame on the senior officials who had been involved in the deed.

He was shocked when the Commission, after going into all aspects of the case, held that the Minister must fully and squarely accept the responsibility. Krishnamachari resigned from the Cabinet. Pandit Nehru accepted the resignation, but made an endorsement which revealed how he felt about the whole matter. He wrote :

Despite the clear finding of the Commission, so far as you are concerned, I am most convinced that your part in this matter was the smallest and that you did not even know what was done.

How right was it for the Prime Minister to give a clean chit to a Minister found guilty by an impartial body ? Was it not a posture of defiance of democratic procedures and proprieties ? If under such circumstances, there was a minority which even carried the impression that Pandit Nehru himself had an axe to grind in the whole affair, how could one stifle such thoughts specially when his critics, still a microscopic minority pointed out how the industrialist whom the Life Insurance Corporation helped? Hari Das Mundra had in January 1957 contributed one and a half lakhs of rupees to the UP Congress fund and another one lakh rupees to the Central Congress Party at Calcutta ! These amounts had come in handy for the Congress Party during the elections in the spring of 1957.

Nehru conclusively proved his attitude towards his trusted colleagues by inducting Krishnamachari back into the Central Cabinet again in 1962.

To prove that these two incidents were not flashes in the pan but reflected the attitude of Pandit Nehru, came the scandal which has been recorded under the title, "K. D. Malaviya-Serajuddin Affair". Malaviya was the Minister for Mines and Fuels. He had

suggested to Serajuddin, the owner of a mining complex in Orissa, to contribute Rs 10,000 to help the Congress candidate from the Basti constituency in Uttar Pradesh in the 1957 elections to the State legislature. The industrialist had dutifully followed the directive of the Minister.

This provided the backdrop for the scandal. There was room to believe that Malaviya had gone out of his way to recommend the application of Serajuddin for the issue of an import licence to procure machinery, required by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, on a private barter basis against manganese ore exported by his firm to Czechoslovakia. This suspicion could not be eliminated. It became a hot topic of discussion in political circles. It finally found expression in Parliament.

Pandit Nehru did not go full length to meet the demands for an enquiry. He sought a via media. He had burnt his fingers on the previous occasion when Krishnamachari stood indicted by the Chagla Commission. Eager to avoid the odious publicity which accompanied open enquiries, he chose to refer the matter to Justice S.K. Das. The judge, a sitting member of the bench of the Supreme Court, was directed to make a quasi-judicial enquiry. Nehru wanted it to be 'a private, unobtrusive enquiry without any fuss. Whatever recommendations the judge gives will be sent to me.' This approach threw a cloak of secrecy over the whole enquiry. By ensuring that the report would be submitted to him directly, Pandit Nehru further ensured that he would have the freedom to decide finally on the case. He could sit in judgement over the recommendations of the judge of the Supreme Court.

The report that Nehru received held Malaviya guilty on two counts. Malaviya resigned. Once again, Pandit Nehru showed his spleen at the exit of a colleague who enjoyed his confidence, and added, 'I am not personally convinced that Shri Malaviya has done anything which casts a reflection on his impartiality and integrity.' This statement, when set against the conclusions of the quasi-judicial enquiry, reveals the prejudia of Pandit Nehru in assessing bonafides of his colleagues. Instead of accepting the facts that his men are not infallible he defended them, even after their mistakes and crimes had been conclusively substantiated

by fair and open enquiry bodies. By this stance, he gave scope for the growth of a feeling that all that one needed to do was to be on the right side of the Prime Minister and he could get away with any corrupt act. Nehru even mouthed his rage with the words, 'some parties, having failed absolutely to do anything against us in regard to our policies are going in for personal attacks on Ministers.'

He saw every charge of corruption against one of the members of his closed circle as an attempt to undermine his authority and position. He saw, in every plea for a probe, a surreptitious move to expose his flanks and to get at him. He imagined that the attacks mounting his associates, would finally recoil on him. These considerations (to which he might not have given conscious acceptance) worked within him, swayed his response to the need for establishing high moral conduct. His petulance on every occasion he was forced to accept the exit of one or the other of his Cabinet colleagues, evoked the response from the *Guardian* of London, 'Nehru has put loyalty before national interest.'

The tentacles of Pandit Nehru reached out to keep in their protective fold political bosses in the States too. He stood out, firmly, against the charges levelled against Kairon, the chief Minister of Punjab. In 1958, the General Secretary of the Congress Party enquired into the activities of the relatives of the Chief Minister and observed that there were several improprieties and irregularities of which the sons of the Chief Minister were guilty. Pandit Nehru scoffed at the report, called it 'fantastic, frivolous and absurd.'

For another five years, Kairon ruled like an autocrat, imposed his will over the legislature and the executive, acted as if he was beyond the pale of the law. Of course, the State progressed rapidly, but at a heavy cost in terms of democratic norms and formalities. The resultant rot that set in was, in the long run, to lead to the rule of a much more authoritarian style in Haryana. Bansi Lal improved on the techniques of Kairon, gave his position more teeth and muscles, stamped on all the basic principles of democracy experimented, on a miniature scale, the reign of terror which later enveloped the whole nation in June 1975.

Pandit Nehru was aware of the widespread corruption among many Chief Ministers, Cabinet Ministers and members of the Legislatures. Yet, he did not take swift and stern action against the guilty. He had travelled a long way from the days of the struggle for freedom when he had emphatically declared himself against corruption and had indignantly asserted that he would deal firmly with economic offenders. He had allowed rhetoric to get the better of his sense when he indicated that blackmarketeers would be hanged by the nearest lamp posts.

Such lofty ideals, however, got diluted once he was at the helm of the affairs of State. He is reported to have explained his failure to contain corruption with the words, 'I have tried to work through honest people; but the country did not go far. These two or three Chief Ministers you mentioned, well I know they are corrupt, but they are efficient.' This act could only be compared with a step which a shepherd would never take. It was like handing over the task of guarding the sheep to a wolf, just because his trusty dog had become slack.

If Nehru had realised how his image would get tarnished by his open support for the corrupt who, incidentally, proved to be efficient, (Efficient in what ? In serving their own interests ? Let us dwell at length on finding the answers to these questions. They sought quick results by discarding all the rules of democracy and learned that only power meant life. Naturally, they clung to power. For they were not keen to commit political harakiri), he would have swung into action. Rightly has James Cameron noted :

It was no secret that this honest man (Pandit Nehru), in his final weariness, was well aware of the sycophancy and corruption that surrounded him and remained silent while it flourished because he was too vain to acknowledge it and too weak to fight it.

His weakness was reflected in the half-hearted attempts, made from time to time, to rid the girdles of power of the impact of corruption. Occasional departmental studies, ornately written circulars and pamphlets, high perorations from public platforms and action against some lowly men in the political or administrative

ladder to publicise the Government's will to fight the menace, did not carry with them the weight of the determination which alone could have proved effective.

Another instrument in the hands of the Government was fully exploited to give an impression that it was all set on removing corruption, yet to stall any prompt move. A wag had quipped that a committee is the collection of incompetent, appointed by the unwilling, to postpone decisions. The various committees which the Government appointed, from time to time, were not composed of incompetent men. But they were appointed by those who were all set to abort many, if not all, the recommendations of the august committee.

It was tragic that the sound recommendations of the Santhanam Committee, appointed in 1962, were allowed to remain just so much sound. No action. The Committee, which submitted its recommendations on 31st March 1964, clearly indicated the prevailing rot and suggested measures to stem the same. It read :

There is a widespread impression that failure of integrity is not uncommon among Ministers and that some Ministers who have held office during the last sixteen years have enriched themselves illegitimately, obtained good jobs for their sons and relations through nepotism, and have reaped other advantages inconsistent with any notion of purity in public life. The general belief about failure of integrity among Ministers is as damaging as actual failure.\*

The Committee suggested the drafting of a Code of Conduct for Ministers relating to 'acquisition of property, acceptance of gifts and disclosure of assets and liabilities.' It also recommended that 'specific allegation of corruption on the part of a Minister at the Centre or a State should be promptly investigated by an agency whose findings will command respect... If the Minister is found guilty of the allegations or is found to have been corrupt, he should be dismissed and should also become ineligible for becoming a Minister or for holding any elective office.'

These recommendations found their way into the archives of

the Government. Once again, public rumblings against corruption had been quelled by an eyewash.

The blame, of course, cannot be put on Pandit Nehru. He died within two months of the submission of its recommendations by the Committee. But one gets a feeling, (one hopes it is wrong, but one can't escape it), that the end result, even if Pandit Nehru had lived to study and to decide on the implementation of the recommendations, would have been the same.

For to some extent, Pandit Nehru himself was guilty. The Santhanam Committee had stated that 'Ministers had obtained good jobs for their sons and relations through nepotism.' Did they have the Prime Minister too in mind, the Prime Minister who spared no efforts to build up the image of his daughter, Mrs Indira Gandhi ?

It was Pandit Nehru who induced Dr Radha Krishnan to utilise the services of Mrs Indira Gandhi at the UNICEF. Mrs Gandhi found the duties dull and insipid. The job was not what she wanted. It did not provide full scope for growth in the vocation she loved, the line which she wanted to choose as her career.

The hidden hand of Nehru inducted her into the Congress Working Committee. She was her father's daughter. That was what found her a berth in the apex policy decision-making body of the National Congress.

For four years she waited in the wings, observing the titans at play, learning the tricks of the trade, gaining the requisite insight into the complex actions and reactions that pulsate through political confabulations. For four years, she was involved in the whole gamut of power politics.

She saw her chance for a further rise when the Congress President U. N. Dhebar resigned. The Party leaders decided to induct Nijalingappa as the Congress President. At that time, the Prime Minister intervened, tilted the scales in favour of his daughter. Durga Das, an eminent journalist and political commentator, had recorded how the Congress bosses were persuaded to go back on their decision and to settle for Mrs Gandhi.

Was Pandit Nehru gradually building up the national image of his daughter ? Was he steadily preparing the ground for his

daughter to succeed him as the Prime Minister ?

Quite a few political observers, including Frank Moraes, could not get away from the feeling, vague though, that Pandit Nehru was actively fostering the cause of his daughter. Frank Moraes has recorded :

Some alleged that he (Pandit Nehru) had all along marked his daughter Indira Gandhi, for the succession. They point to his interest in her election as Congress President in 1959 after she had served four years as a member of its Working Committee... Even if these rumours carry some credibility they reveal an unusual hiatus in Nehru's thinking... Few things could irritate him more than to be asked who was being groomed to succeed him. 'Why should I nominate my successors' He once exclaimed. 'It isn't democratic. It's for the Party or people to decide.'

Somehow this rang false, for Nehru, while theoretically right, knew that the people had little or no say in it. Even within the Party he was aware that the choice would be influenced by a small caucus. In his own mind, I am sure, he was determined that none of the old guard, particularly Morarji Desai to whom he was personally and politically allergic, should succeed him. And he was too much of a democrat to project his daughter as his direct successor, however greatly he might have desired it.

In other words, Frank Moraes says that he desired it. And he went about it with diabolic cleverness. Again, to quote Frank Moraes :

Nehru was not without shrewdness or guile : like Franklin D. Roosevelt, he had something of the lion and the fox in him, and none understood better the mechanics and manipulations of Indian politics. In 1962, his hitherto robust health showed signs of cracking and it is possible that he felt the time had come to put his political papers in order, so out of the blue in August 1963, he ruthlessly slashed his Cabinet, dropping some of his senior colleagues... The most prominent among them was Morarji Desai. If his plan

was to rule Desai out of succession, he achieved it... For whom was he clearing the road ? At that juncture, it could not have been for his daughter since he must have realised that the chances of her stepping immediately into the succession were slim. Like all men Nehru might also have felt he was good for a few more years. He probably reckoned that there was still time to prepare the road for succession.

Death intervend, did not give Nehru sufficient time to prepare the road to succession so that his daughter could assume office on his death.

But he did all that he possibly could to give pep to her image. He even surrendered the values he cherished to indicate that she was a leader in her own right. When she roused public passions and set out on the task of hounding the Communist regime in Kerala out of office in 1959, he demurred. He could not easily concede the demand made by his daughter that the duly elected regime in Kerala had lost the right to continue in office because a section of the populace were irked by the reforms of the regime. He knew that taking the battle of the ballot to the streets would go against all canons of justice. Yet, he yielded. He felt elated when his daughter was hailed as the liberator of Kerala. He shared the pride that suffused Mrs Gandhi at her triumph. He smothered all feelings of moral guilt inherent in the move. He, as well as his daughter, was in politics. And anything could be justified in politics.

Under the influence of his daughter, Pandit Nehru retracted on one of his firm decisions to hold on to bilingual Bombay. He had again and again lashed out at the protagonists at the division of bilingual Bombay. He saw in it a redemption of his conviction that linguistic states, which were forced out of him first by the people of Andhra after the self-immolation of Potti Sriramulu, and then by other linguistic groups, were not in the interest of the country.

Yet, when Mrs Gandhi, as President of the Indian National

Congress, threw her weight in favour of division of bilingual Bombay on the basis of language, Pandit Nehru buckled down. What had till then been matter of principle now assumed the form of a political question which deserved to be tackled afresh in the light of the changing circumstances. He saw light, the light cast by his daughter. It cut through his doubts and misgivings. It made him resilient and pliable. He readily agreed to the bifurcation of bilingual Bombay into states comprising the two linguistic groups, the Maharashtrians and the Gujaratis

These two achievements added to the stature of Mrs Gandhi. They were feathers in her political cap. Some commentators whispered that these feathers were earned rather easily. They were rather tagged on to her cap by her loving father who had immediately on her election as the President of the Congress Party, expressed his delight.

I am proud of Indira Gandhi as my daughter, my comrade and now as my leader. It is superfluous for me to say that I love her. I am proud of her good nature, proud of her energy to work, proud of her integrity and truthfulness.

It was pride in his daughter, conditioned by parental love, that led Pandit Nehru in yielding to the proposals of Mrs Gandhi. It provided the driving force for two moves, one palpably undemocratic and the other considered undesirable by Pandit Nehru himself.

Determined to build up the personality of his daughter, Pandit Nehru sent her globe-trotting as his emissary. He elevated her to the office of the Chairman of the National Integration Committee which was entrusted with the task of fighting the divisive forces in the country. He inducted her into the National Defence Committee formed in the wake of the Chinese attack in 1962.

Her name was projected through her contacts with decision making bodies. Her image was built up assiduously as one who had a mind of her own. Her qualities as a leader were brought out effulgently. Covertly and overtly, attempts were made to give

glamour to the figure of Mrs Gandhi. To give credence to her claims to be counted among the national leadership, her two major achievement during her tenure as President of the Congress were quoted. The Nehru name provided the much needed charisma too.

Her projection into the highest echelons of political leadership was deftly handled and manipulated by Pandit Nehru. He did not carry even the vaguest suspicion that his advocacy of his daughter's cause too had a tinge of corrupt practices. The incorruptible had been corrupted by parental love.

This view is sustained by Janardhan Thakur. He has gone on record with the comment :

It is no secret that Indira Gandhi wanted to become the Prime Minister right after her father's death. And even Nehru, despite his democratic faith, had wanted it that way. In his failing years he had thought of Indira as his successor and confided his secrets and ploys only to her. When he returned to Delhi, after his last visit to Dehradun, Uma Shankar Dixit, another 'retainer' of the Nehrus, had gone to meet Nehru. One of the points Nehru mentioned to Dixit that evening was about his daughter. 'Indu can take decisions. Help her, help her.' Kamaraj the king-maker, is said to have confided to political colleagues and journalists close to him that Nehru told him, 'After me, Indira.'

Love blinded Pandit Nehru's basic nature. It made him tilt in favour of his daughter. It helped him see her as a possible successor. He believed that she alone would keep the country on the ideals and values he cherished. All others, more politically mature, more well versed in politics, more experienced in handling ministerial responsibilities, seemed to have ideas of their own, ideas suppressed and subjugated to those of the master, but not completely obliterated.

It was love that first contrived to convert him into a shield for the corrupt. He extended his protective umbrella to all those who remained personally loyal to him, shielded them from attacks from all quarters. It was love, parental love, which cut through his incorruptible frame, attenuated his basic nature, made him not only a shield for the corrupt, but a part of the corrupt set-up itself.

## Indira is India

There was a short interregnum between Pandit Nehru's death and Mrs Gandhi's elevation to the office of Prime Minister.

It is a matter of some conjecture whether this brief interlude, when someone other than a Nehru occupied the post of Prime Minister, would ever have been introduced into the post-Independence history of India if Pandit Nehru had lived for another five years.

All available facts indicate that Pandit Nehru was subtly pulling the strings and preparing the ground for his daughter to acquire the necessary skill in statecraft and develop political acumen to hold her own on the national scene. A successor was being groomed.

As a democratic Caesar, he wanted to bring about this change through normal processes. He hoped to ensure his daughter's succession with the tacit approval of the masses, which, in real terms, is a synonym for Party bosses. He was keen that all the formalities of the democratic procedures were maintained.

Yet, he was equally eager to pass on the mantle of power to his daughter. It was not merely love for his daughter that led him along, but an unexpressed feeling that the direction he had given to the country might be reversed if power passed into the hands of one or the other of those in the Party who did not subscribe to his ideas. He believed that the policies he had evolved were the best for the country and that only someone who fully shared his convictions could accelerate the nation's pace towards the goal he had in mind.

His sudden death caught the Party bosses napping, and shocked the entire nation. The oft repeated cry, 'After Nehru, who?' reverberated in the awesome silence over the country.

An age had ended. Another age was to begin.

Between the two, fate introduced the interregnum, a short lapse of an year and half, and chose a frail but determined man, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to fill the vacuum caused by Pandit Nehru's death.

Lal Bahadur Shastri started off as a dark horse.

The Party bosses selected him, in preference to Morarji Desai who, by virtue of seniority in the Party hierarchy and by virtue of his standing in the Party, had a better claim to the office. It was a measure of the desire of the Party bosses not to get themselves pushed, once again, to a back seat by a powerful Prime Minister. They had had enough of such experience under Pandit Nehru, and knew the weight of the implications. They knew that Morarji was a puritan, a man of firm convictions, an untractable politician. His moral postures and spiritual poses flashed out, clearly, the line he would take once he became the Prime Minister. They had a taste of his way of thinking when he introduced two measures—the CDS and the Gold Control Order—which were potential economic reforms, aimed at curbing inflation and smuggling and thus strengthening the economy of the nation, yet irked and irritated the vocal section of the populace and exposed the Congress to criticism.

Morarji had acquired formidable dimensions as a man who had the courage of his convictions. Therein lay his weakness.

The Party bosses turned to Lal Bahadur Shastri, nurturing the hope that he would abide by their directives. What they aspired for was real power. They wanted to manipulate the puppets. They expected Lal Bahadur Shastri to be the mask behind which they could wield real power.

Inevitably, they mistook Shastri's gentleness and fragility for weakness. They noticed that he had risen to prominence in the Party, won the favour of Pandit Nehru, and gained in stature without stepping on the corns of any of his colleagues. He had laboured patiently, quietly to the top, carefully keeping almost everyone in good humour. He had not expressed himself firmly or militantly on any issue likely to cause big stirs, had assumed for himself the image of an able and competent negotiator.

This image helped him beget the support of the Party bosses who saw in him a pliable instrument of their will.

None questioned Shastri's political acumen. Nor did anyone question his administrative skill. What was suspected was his capacity to be an effective successor to Nehru.

These doubts were soon dispelled. Shastri proved that he was not a political cipher. He revealed exceptional grit and tenacity. He knew his duties and powers. Pandit Nehru had already set the guidelines for functioning effectively as Prime Minister. He espied what V.B. Kulkarni spelt out much later :

It would be said of Nehru, as it was said of Palmerston, that his personality was a power... But paradoxically, his titanic stature was itself a great liability to the growth of the country's free institutions. Not only his Party but his Cabinet and the Congress-dominated Parliament became willing or reluctant instruments of his imperious will... Abandoning the salutary policy of recruiting only men of proved ability and integrity, and of independent judgement, Nehru gave his Cabinet a stamp of one party dominance.

There were, of course, outstanding Congressmen in the Central Cabinet, but few among them could hope to make their views prevail if they did not accord with those of the Prime Minister. K.M. Munshi and N.V. Gadgil were neither flatterers nor ill-equipped persons and yet on the question of Tibet their well-considered point of view was brushed aside.

In his prefatory note to Sardar Patel's letter of November 7, 1950, to Nehru, published in a journal, Munshi wrote : "During the Cabinet meeting on the Tibetan question, all of us acquiesced in what Jawaharlal Nehru had already done, only one or two of us venturing to voice feeble criticism. Among them was Shri N.V. Gadgil for whom there was a snub. 'Don't you realise that the Himalayas are there ?' I timidly ventured to say that in the seventh century the Tibetans had crossed the Himalayas and invaded Kanauj."

Munshi did not record how the Prime Minister reacted to this reminder.

The style thus set by Pandit Nehru, the style that allowed him

to impose his views on his Cabinet colleagues, was something which automatically appealed to Shastri too. Of course, it took him some time to understand the range and scope of the power vested in his office. Once he had a measure of the power he enjoyed, he broke away from the shackles tagged on to him by the Party bigwigs. He revealed that he had a mind of his own when he listened to conflicting views, but kept his own counsel.

His finest hour came with the surprise attack by Pakistan. The confidence with which he led the nation during the tumultuous days, made him a hero among the masses. His dynamism whipped up the will of the nation to fight back aggression. The small-statured Shastri, who had been compared to a pygmy, physically and mentally, now loomed in the public as a giant among leaders.

Mrs Gandhi watched, with dismay, the growing influence of Shastri. As his image gained in public esteem, her own dreams of wielding power and influence at the apex, and of gaining adequate strength to make herself eligible to become the Prime Minister later, receded further. She realised that the new political developments had pushed her into the background. She still clung on to the belief that the Party would turn to her and ask her to occupy the highest post. But she knew that her hopes were transient, that she was running on the quicksand of politics. She was reduced to the rank of a minor minion. She held her court, but was denied access to major policy decisions. She expressed her impressions of those days of political wilderness to Ved Mehta :

I was numbed by my father's death, and at the time I didn't want to think of holding any office. But I thought if I helped Shastri to become Prime Minister, then, when he got to office, he would consult with me and in that way I would still have some influence on the future of the country...I did many things for Shastri, but once he got established as Prime Minister, he didn't consult me on any of the major issues.

When all seemed to be lost, when Mrs Gandhi began to toy with the idea of retiring from politics and emigrating, temporarily, to England to be with her sons, the much-needed break came. History conspired to change course and to bring a ray of hope into

her life. It brought about a sudden change in the political scene and set the field free for Mrs Gandhi. It pulled her out of her depression, catapulted her into the office she coveted.

The death of Shastri at Tashkent, on 10th January 1966, immediately after signing the agreement with President Ayub Khan for restoration of normalcy on the sub-continent and for promotion of Indo-Pak amity, was the historic event that changed the course of Mrs Gandhi's life.

The search for an acceptable candidate for the high office began almost immediately.

Gulzarilal Nanda, who, for the second time, was officiating as the Prime Minister, thrust and parried in the rear, hopefully pressed his claim. He did not sense his limitations. His tenure as a Minister in the Central Cabinet had earned for him, from *Shankar's Weekly*, the satirical dig that he had a longest period of unbrilliance. His pathetic attempts impressed none.

The real tussle was between Morarji Desai and Mrs Gandhi.

Mrs Gandhi's claim rested, mainly, on the fact that she had the charisma lent to her image. She was Nehru's daughter. Of course, she did not have the national stature as freedom fighter and as post-independence administrator. She had no political base of her own.

These were the weaknesses that she carried with her, the weaknesses which endeared her to the Party bosses. They were in no mood to have a super-human as Prime Minister. They failed to realise that the office had acquired immense power, that none but an imbecile would have remained tractable after assuming office. Led by the hope that Mrs Gandhi would remain docile they threw their combined weight behind her. They saw in her a '*Goongi Gudiya*', a dumb doll or a puppet who would dance to the tunes they played.

Mrs Gandhi did not indicate what she had in her mind. Perhaps, at that time, all that counted with her was her desire to become the Prime Minister. She felt instinctively grateful to the Party bosses, who were called the Syndicate. She promised to abide by their advice, agreed to be guided by them before initiating major reforms.

Nehru's hopes were thus redeemed.

The Party bosses did a grave injustice to the nation when they allowed their choice to be swayed by considerations other than merit or suitability. They committed the crime of according prime position to personal interests, of relegating national interests to second place. They were, after all, men to whom political power meant more than national interest.

If they could have had a peep into the future they would have shuddered. But, mercifully, the future had cast no shadow to make them doubtful. Happy at their choice, elated at their success in thwarting the stern and stiff Desai, the Party bosses nurtured hopes of being the real power behind the throne.

It was a monumental mistake and, of course, they paid for it.

Mrs Gandhi gauged the latent strength of her office. During Nehru's days, she had watched him, admired how he held absolute sway over the Party and the Government. His style was what she wanted to acquire. She studied the technique of her father. She realised that Nehru had made himself the absolute ruler of India by exploiting his popularity among the masses. It was his hold over the Indian people that gave him the status of the uncrowned king of India.

She could really gain power only by going beyond the Party and by finding rapport with the masses. If she remained within the stifling confines of the Party, she would never gain the power which she craved. Freedom was what she craved for, freedom to wield absolute power, freedom to dictate terms to everyone, including those in the Party and in the Cabinet.

As a tentative experiment of her power, she devalued the rupee without consulting the Party. Kamaraj, who was a leading member of the Syndicate and who was the Congress President, reeled at the move which had far-reaching economic implications and hence should have been discussed at Party forums. Other members of the Syndicate wondered what Mrs Gandhi was up to. Her move ruffled the old guard. They could feel vaguely the implications of move. If Mrs. Gandhi continued to have her way, they would be playing second fiddle ; or perhaps no fiddle at all.

They did not have the courage to expose her in public. The

devaluation of the currency was criticised in Party meetings. Mrs Gandhi countered the criticism stating that it was an inevitable step, needed for pepping up the nation's economy.

She felt elated. She had pulled a fast one on the Party bosses. She had indicated to them that she was the boss of the bosses. It was a symbolic gesture, an act of defiance.

The Party bosses were none too happy with her style of functioning. But they had no way out of the angle—at best, not till the General Elections which were due in the spring of 1967.

They decided to exploit their options more carefully in 1967.

Their calculations went awry due to the sudden swing away from the Congress by a large section of the electorate. The dismal performance of the Congress at the polls came as a surprise to many. The Party lost a quarter of its seats in the Lok Sabha. Its strength got reduced from 361 to 279 in a house of 525.

It was a heavy blow for the members of the Syndicate. Kamaraj, Atulya Ghosh and S.K. Patil were rejected at the polls. Defeat in the open cut down their political stature and consequently their political confidence and strength. They could no longer claim that they represented the will of the people. They were becoming political non-entities.

Humbled at the polls, the Party bosses still pretended to hold the levers of power. They behaved as if they could decide the issue of leadership.

Once again, they found themselves facing a difficult choice. It lay between Mrs Gandhi, who was in power, and Desai, who showed no signs of abandoning his convictions and fads.

They were on the horns of a dilemma. They studied the two candidates. They found much to be scared of in the unbending, unrelenting posture of Desai. In comparison, Mrs Gandhi was more pliable. She herself was none too strong. The reverses suffered at the polls by the Party were attributed to her inept handling of national affairs. There had been nothing spectacular about her first term in office, no indication of the strength that would seep into her, once she was given a full term of office.

Her apparent weakness appealed to the Party bosses. They chose her in preference to Morarji. They fettered her by imposing

the condition that Morarji Desai would be made the Deputy Prime Minister.

It was a compromise, an uneasy compromise, an illegitimate compromise. It revealed the fragility of the Party leadership. They knew that Mrs Gandhi had a touch of Nehru in her, that she too was crazy for power. Yet, they threw in their lot with her. They paved the way for the triumphant march of Mrs Gandhi to the zenith of her career. She grabbed the opportunity with alacrity. She pursued the policy of building her own power base. She resorted to all the tricks of the trade to undermine her opponents and to make herself the supreme boss of the Party and the Government.

Subterfuges became the order of the day. Words were flaunted around, promises solemnly made, pledges readily taken without any one being keen to keep his word. Morality and ethics were terms which were gradually edged out from the vocabulary of politics.

In the beginning, the Party bosses showed enough tenacity to curb Mrs Gandhi's attempts to have her own way. She had kept Sanjiva Reddy out of the Cabinet, stating that he would make an eminent Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

But when the time for nomination came, Mrs Gandhi developed cold feet. She hummed and hawed vaguely indicating her reluctance to stick to her former proposal. It was a gentle probe to find out the strength of her opponents in the Party. It was not a major issue on which she wanted to bring about a clash. She was still flexing her political muscles to see who got rattled and who didn't. She thawed when she found the opposition to her move to keep Sanjiva Reddy out of the Speakership too strong. She yielded.

Of course, she yielded, but it revealed the style she had in mind. She had found how easy it was, now that she was in power, to upset the Party bosses. Her confidence also sprang from the realisation that the Party bosses were old men, fostering out-dated concepts, living on past achievements, ignorant of their loss of real hold among the masses. Her assessment was right. Kamaraj, Patil and Atulya were men who had failed to find favour with their electorate.

The Congress had assumed the right to lead the country. The leaders of the Congress were emboldened in their attempts to identify the Party with the country. This was a dangerous trend. Frank Moraes espied this trend and thundered like an oracle, in 1967 :

The temptation to identify the nation with the Party, paradoxically weakens the national core of the Party and results in putting the Party before the country. From there it is a small step to putting self before party.

Mrs Gandhi set her heart on that small step. By taking that small step she could achieve absolute power, become, as Barooah was to comment later, the emblem of India, the sole force of India and give sustenance to the slogan 'Indira is India.'

It was relatively easy for Mrs Gandhi to take this small step, No small voice of conscience pricked her ; no moral consideration weakened her will. She was convinced that she alone, like her father in the past, could lead the nation out of the economic and social morass. This was a conviction which gave teeth to her zest for power. It provided the wherewithal for the pursuit of unbridled power.

She exploited the available human resources. She exploited them and, when no longer required, dumped them into a political no-man's land. Men were her plaything ; ideologies, her instruments to progress, slogans and processions and congregations, her road to absolute power. It was this style which provoked Ashis Nandy to note :

The culture of the Emergency was built on a myth every political leader nurtures, namely that he can control and use his silent and apparently dim-witted and obsequious sycophants. From the time Jawaharlal Nehru who protected Partap Singh Kairon and Ravi Shankar Shukla to Mrs Gandhi who thought she could hold in leash her colourful thugs, everybody underestimated the extent to which his political instruments could become autonomous and follow their own inner logic.

Mrs Gandhi's inner logic violated basic human values. Moral principles became victims of naked power. They were skinned, chemically processed and then used as masks to justify palpably immoral act. The well-known lie-ability of the politician struck at the very roots of morality. Slogans and shibboleths filled the air. Propaganda gave the touch of truth to naked lies. Goebbels would have been proud if he had seen how his tactics were successfully employed in India.

Thus, the cult of the individual was fostered and nurtured and nourished. The nation had already been reduced, in the eyes of most Congressmen, to complete identification with Congress Party. With a slight push, the change that Mrs Gandhi desired was achieved. The Party became irretrievably submerged in the personality of the leader. She saw her role as Prime Minister as prime in every way. She defined her interpretation of the office she held *vis a vis* the Party thus :

The Prime Minister has to have a national point of view. The organisation chief is more concerned about the Party. This is what happened with me, for instance, about devaluation. I am told that I should make the decision after the election so that nothing should hurt the Party's prospects. But if he has a political stake, (as the Prime Minister), he has to have the same stake. The clash of personality is secondary... The Party must act as a bridge between the people and the Government.

She convinced the Party to be a one-way bridge. She exploited the Party to interpret the decision taken by her and her Government to the masses in a favourable light. The accepted form of democracy where the Party discussed and evolved basic policies and left the implementation to the Government, was discarded.

Mrs Gandhi visualised herself at the centre of the power machinery. She became the hub of the whole tangled frame. She became the nexus of all moves to trim and to truncate and to weaken those in the Party who questioned her right to hold absolute power, who threatened to dislodge her if she stepped beyond the limits set by them, who were none too keen to get back

to the some sort of "bonded labour" which had marked the Nehru era.

Kamaraj, alienated from Mrs Gandhi, carrying the impression that she had not put in her best efforts to help him in the elections in 1967, nurturing the doubt that she had deliberately brought about his defeat as well as those of Patil and Atulya Ghosh, looked at every move of the Prime Minister with suspicion. The other members of the Syndicate shared the misconceptions of Kamaraj. They felt deflated as Mrs Gandhi shed all the sham postures of a meek and tractable Prime Minister. They had been outwitted, taken for a ride by a lady whose political acumen had been rated by them as very low.

Mrs Gandhi took the first step to tighten the reins on the Party bosses. She found a willing instrument in Chandrashekhar. The bomb burst when Chandrashekhar openly attacked Morarji, charged him with shielding his son, Kantilal. Charges were hurled at some of the deals of Kantilal. Rumours were set afloat about the illicit money he had acquired by operating as an insurance agent, by exploiting his links with the Finance Minister.

Morarji Desai protested against the public attack on him by a member of his Party. He told Mrs Gandhi that Chandrashekhar had exceeded the limits set by Party discipline, and exhorted her to reprimand Chandrashekhar. Mrs Gandhi placated Desai with empty words. She, however, did not haul up Chandrashekhar as she had no intention of doing so. Chandrashekhar had acted as her agent. He had, with his attack, made a deep dent in the image of exceptional moral rectitude and high integrity that Morarji projected. It was a move meant to corrode his personality and to weaken his appeal to the masses.

It was power politics that she played. To play the game effectively she had to give up all accepted norms of democracy.

She surrounded herself with her own henchmen. The men changed according to her requirements. She refused to place complete faith in anyone. She used them to serve her purpose. And she had no hesitation in dropping them, like so much dead wood, the moment she had no further use for them. The Mankekars observed this trait of Mrs Gandhi :

She does not trust others very much and very long. The slightest difference is enough to offend her and induce her to drop the friend or the adviser and thereafter she won't look at him again.

She does not tolerate overcompetent and ambitious men around her ; the moment they showed such symptoms, she cuts them to size or banishes them. That is how she surrounded herself with yes-men.

The Party leaders were not willing to become yes-men. They fidgeted uneasily. They were at the end of the political road. The shabby treatment meted out to Morarji clearly revealed which way the wind was blowing. But they did not know how to stem the flow of power which she had accumulated in her hands. They had, as Nirad Chaudhuri noted, brought her in 'as a safe figure-head. But she had not remained the holy mascot which the caucus thought she would only be too happy to remain. If she was made the Prime Minister because she was the daughter of Nehru, the same relationship had also given her a character which should have been reckoned with.'

It looked to the Party bosses that they would soon be reduced to nonentities. They were floundering in the backwash of the tide of Mrs Gandhi's power when Dr Zakir Hussain died of a heart attack. His death opened up a possible route that the leaders could trail. They grabbed the chance to impose one of their nominees as the President of India. Though the office of President held little power, only glamour, the Party leaders sensed that with their nominee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, they would have some viable machinery to check the authoritarian tendencies exhibited by Mrs Gandhi.

They sprang a surprise on her at the Parliamentary Board meeting at Bangalore. The Board had been authorised by the Congress Working Committee to decide on the Congress nominee, if possible, unanimously, and by a majority vote, if no unanimity was possible.

Mrs Gandhi toyed with the idea of elevating Jagjivan Ram to the highly ornamental post and thus to cut him out of active politics. But she was thwarted in her attempts. She found herself

calculatedly, cornered at Bangalore. The Board by majority vote opted for Sanjiva Reddy.

This was the moment of greatest crisis for Mrs Gandhi. The Party bosses had scored over her. She did not forget the defeat. Her future was at stake. Her quest for absolute power was running into rough weather. She had no intention of waiting and watching while manacles were clamped on to her hands.

Chandrashekhar, Krishna Kant and Mohan Dharia, along with D. P. Mishra and Dinesh Singh, provided the brains trust around her. It was evident to them that Mrs Gandhi planned to hack her way, if required, towards central authority. Of course, they believed that she was not heading towards dictatorship.

She waited, eagerly, for some false move on the part of the Party bosses to wriggle out of her commitment to support the candidature of Sanjiva Reddy. She put on the mien of acquiescence to the directive of the Party and filed the candidature of Sanjiva Reddy. None knew what cauldron of ideas seethed in her mind, what subtle plan she formulated.

She got the much-needed lever to get even with the Party bosses when Nijalingappa met the leaders of the Jana Sangh to seek support for Sanjiva Reddy. There was nothing dishonourable in the meeting. The President of India is expected to be above Party affiliations, to be a truly national figure. It was quite justified on the part of the Congress President to seek the support of other political parties for Sanjiva Reddy.

Mrs Gandhi seized, with alacrity, the chance offered to her. She accused Nijalingappa of hobnobbing with communal elements. Pretending to suffer from pangs of insult, she declared that she would act according to the dictates of her conscience. Conscience was recruited to be her instrument in her fight for absolute power. She had a ready candidate in V.V. Giri who had filed his nomination as an independent. If she could bring about his election, Giri would be indebted to her. She would have her own man in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

She refused to issue a whip to the Party MPs to vote for Sanjiva Reddy. She led the move for the freedom of the legislature to vote according to the dictates of their conscience.

The Party bosses hesitated. If they had swung into action and expelled her from the Party, the chastened members of the Party would have stood by Sanjiva Reddy. Instead, the Party bosses sought parleys and negotiations. They kept on with their talks while the ground was cut from under their feet.

They did not realise what was at stake. Mrs Gandhi was making a bold bid for absolute power. It was beginning of the style about which Uma Vasudev commented :

What Indira Gandhi did was to encourage a code of loyalty with such rigid ramifications that like everything else, these became accentuated during the Emergency. Loyalty to the Congress was not enough ; it had to be loyalty expressed in terms of unequivocal personal allegiance to her.

Immorality had its victory when Mrs Gandhi unceremoniously stripped Morarji of the Finance portfolio, stating that he could not effectively bring about control over the big banks. While Morarji had already drafted some rules to govern the activities of big banks, Mrs Gandhi set her heart on a sensational move that would imprint on public minds her image as a radical leader. It was a ruse to ease Morarji out of his office.

The Congress Party bosses reacted effeminately to the moves of the daring lady. They dithered and collapsed. They tried, desperately, to avoid a split of the Congress. They went down on their knees, placating the lady, hoping to save the Party from nemesis. The more they bowed and scraped, the more defiant and uncompromising she became.

Thus the Party bigwigs lost the golden opportunity to prevent the growth of authoritarianism. They became, by a strange irony of fate, the instruments of her evolution as a law unto herself. To quote Uma Vasudev again :

Had the Congress leadership decided that they would not allow this steady emergence of a powerful one-woman rule, they could have stopped it.

They could have stopped it, but they did not. They played

their cards with complete ineptitude. They failed to understand the mind of Mrs Gandhi, and were completely at sea in their attempts to anticipate her. Or, having an idea of her direction, they were too feeble to prevent her from blazing dubious, albeit new, frontiers of power politics.

To get the better of her opponents, Mrs Gandhi set out on radical reforms whose impact on the masses was instantaneous. In initiating the moves to scrap the privileges enjoyed by the former rulers of native states and to put an end to their privy purses, she was guided more by their propaganda value than anything else. The total amount doled out every year to the former rulers was infinitesimally small when set against the total budgetary outlay. It was a commitment solemnly entered into by the Government. It was a symbolic payment which did not measure up to the readiness with which the rulers had agreed to divest themselves of their powers and positions and status. Further, the provisions for gradual reduction of the privy purses of princes with every succession ensured that it would become almost non-existent over a century.

The scrapping of the princely privileges and the privy purses was a deft move to carve out an image of radicalism. To achieve this, Mrs Gandhi went against all canons of justice. Government, like individuals, must observe certain values and norms if it is to stick to democracy. Flagrant violation of contractual obligations can never be the correct and stable stepping stone to the fulfilment of democratic principles.

The attack on the privileges of the members of the ICS too had immense propaganda value.

With thick clouds of propaganda stretching from horizon to horizon, the masses could not but be blind to the pernicious wraiths of corruption that were settling over the country. They accepted the moves as the harbingers of a new social order. Economic benefits, alas, don't come out of negative moves. But negative moves meant to project the figure of Mrs Gandhi as the champion of the underdog.

It was as the champion of the underdog that she plunged into the elections of 1971. To her aid came the slogan 'GARIBI HATAO'. It struck a positive note when set against negative slogan put up by her opponents 'INDIRA HATAO'.

The landslide victory that Mrs Gandhi won in the 1971 elections left no doubts in the minds of those closest to her that the public could be fed on slogans. She basked in the glare of success. It was success built on dishonesty, abrogation of basic rules of human relationship, negation of contractual obligations for which previous regimes had committed themselves. It was carved out by the image of one individual in whom rested absolute power.

Mrs Gandhi had every reason to feel happy. Her tactics had paid rich dividends. Her mask of radicalism had lured the electorate.

Analysing her style of politics, Frank Moraes concluded :

Nehru used political power to influence economic trends; in a way, his daughter has used economic trends to retain and enlarge her political power.....Her political and economic ideas owe far more to environment, experience and observation than to books.....More discriminating than her father and more discerning, she, is, I think, a better judge of individuals and events. She can be ruthless with those whose opinions she dislikes or whose loyalty she has reason to suspect. She has not hesitated to shed summarily some of her once close political associates, and skill with which she outflanked her more experienced opponents speaks of a combination of calculation, daring and timing which compels respect. Just as Nehru loved India, so does his daughter. But whereas Nehru had no reason to pursue power since it came to him naturally and in the ordained order of things, Indira Gandhi, until the last mid-term general elections of February, 1971, has had to deploy all manner of strategies to retain it.

Mrs Gandhi was at last on her own. She had a massive majority in the Lok Sabha. She had, like her father in his days, complete control over her Party. She thus represented the nation,

the Party and the Government.

Mrs Gandhi still kept up the semblance of democracy. Of course, she was not very happy with critical notes struck by the elite observers of her style. She often lashed out at her critics and indicated that it was only her love for democracy which held her back from taking stern action against her critics. That revealed how consciously she was suppressing her natural instincts. Democracy did not come naturally to her. It was something by which she had to stand to maintain her power. This trait was what provoked Rajinder Puri to rasp out :

It is, of course true that the warning she repeatedly gives that we should be grateful that she stays her hand because she is a democrat, may understandably give rise to the most intriguing line of thought, that there is under way a systematic assault on democratic morale, justified in her own mind by a sense of bitterness that her right to rule this country is sometimes questioned despite the undeniable great services rendered to us by her family.

She maintained the outer crust of democracy intact so long as it served her well. She cut down Chavan's immense hold on the administrative machinery by shifting him to Finance, by bringing under her direct control all the security organisations through which she could hold her prime position in the national set-up.

She boldly led the nation during the tense days of the struggle by the people of then East Pakistan for their democratic rights. It was inevitable that the rumble in the subcontinent affected India seriously. The magnitude of the problem posed by the influx of refugees from East Pakistan made it imperative for Mrs. Gandhi to seek an early solution to the problem. She played her cards with consummate skill. The success of her campaign augmented her image, boosted her self-confidence, revealed that she had the qualities of mind and the temperament to lead the nation.

Mrs. Gandhi stood, in 1971, at the apex of power.

The people of India hailed her bold leadership.

Members of her Party — most of whom owed their all to her stood solidly behind her hoping that they, by being with her, would, in the long run, reap the benefits of power.

Opposition leaders who had questioned her style and tempo which often went against accepted norms and conventions, however, rallied behind her. They conceded that she had exceptional grit, firm resolve and unflinching daring. She was hard like steel. She did not have feet of clay. She was not a fair weather leader. She had it in her to rise to the occasion. And whatever the faults in her make-up, cowardice was not one of them.

Her leadership flowered in all its glory, during the tumultuous years 1971. She firmly built the edifice for supporting the case of the Bengali-speaking populace of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). She formed an alliance with Russia that strengthened India's capacity to face any armed threat. She pushed ahead, doggedly, during the 14-day war which erupted between India and Pakistan on 3rd December, 1971. She was not ruffled when reports of the movement of the US 7th Fleet created a flutter in military circles. With cool courage, she led the nation, basked in the light shed on her when the war ended with the independence of Bangladesh.

That marked Mrs Gandhi's finest hour

There was no doubt, now, about her leadership. She was the unquestioned leader of the nation. Her place was pre-eminent. She stood head and shoulders above all other political leaders, many of whom were older to her and had been in the political arena for much longer.

She had been tested and found fit to lead the nation.

Peace returned once again to the sub-continent.

The people who had watched the growth of Mrs Gandhi from a fledgling to the apex of leadership hoped that she would now harness all her talents to fight the economic malaise which weakened the fabric of Indian society.

She initiated some measures as the prelude to far-reaching economic reforms. But none of these measures -- Bank Nationalisation, scrapping of the princely privileges, socialisation of the ICS

cadre — really altered the economic scenario. The poorest section of the populace were left where they were. They continued to sink in the quicksand of grinding poverty.

Frank Moraes focussed attention on the problem Mrs. Gandhi faced :

Mrs Gandhi's headache began with her massive victory. She had shown herself as a clever tactician, artful in many ways, but she had now to deliver the goods, and her incapacity to think and plan in depth, particularly on economic issues, exposed her limitations as a strategist. India's crushing poverty would not yield to mere slogans. Unless increased productivity generated wealth, there was only poverty to distribute.

None knew how to go about the task of removing poverty. Increasing productivity was something that was neither easy to bring about, nor very appealing.

The masses, roused by the radical moves that held out, according to the champions of the regime, the panacea to the malady, looked up eagerly to Mrs Gandhi to reverse the trend, they stood solidly behind her. They had been taken in by her plea that she could usher in a new era only if she had a clear mandate, if she enjoyed unquestioned majority in Parliament.

Mrs Gandhi's power now came, not from the wavering Party bosses, from the people of India. They saw in her their hope for a better tomorrow. They were not intelligent enough to realise the immorality that had been latent in the so-called radical reforms. They were roused by the catchy slogans, by hopes of the future. They were told all the hurdles of the past that stood in the way of their redemption from poverty would be overcome.

The power that the people gave to Mrs Gandhi to redeem them from the clutches of poverty was exploited by her to gain absolute control over the nation. The Congress Party, of which she was the creator, waited at her beck and call, ready to carry out her directives, eager to be the one-way bridge which was the role she conceived for the Party. She had a President who, even on these matters which fell within the minimal powers accorded to him by the Constitution, looked to her for guidance. He owed his all to her. He

remained loyal to her, at least during the major duration of his tenure. He did try, ineffectively, near the close of his term, to reduce the severity of the move initiated by the Government to contain the strike in the Railways. But, by and large, he stood by her, yielded to her desires.

His successor, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, was not the best choice for the office. H.N. Pandit, in his book, *The PM's President*, records :

One of the oddities in the Presidential election of 1974 was that the Congress Parliamentary Board, which is supposed to have selected Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed as its nominee, itself admitted that he was not the best available person for the post of President. It did so gratuitously by publicly reiterating the Prime Minister's opinion that Swaran Singh or Jagjivan Ram could not be selected because they were indispensable in the Cabinet as Ministers of proven ability. It was left to the people to understand the obvious that the same could not be said about the man who was to become the country's President.....

It seems reasonably certain that India will never again have a really first-rate public figure as the Head of the State. From now onwards, among the qualities which will be looked for in a candidate for Presidentship will be given to his enjoying the fullest trust of the Prime Minister so as to assure her that after election as President he will never do anything to cause her any inconvenience or embarrassment.

She had a quiescent President at Rashtrapati Bhavan. She also got pliable men as Governors of States.

Governors, by and large, were the agents of the Centre. They were politicians, temporarily out of political office, but waiting for better days to come. And better days would come only through pleasing and placating the mightiest power, Mrs Gandhi. So they bent over backwards, readily falling in line with every directive that came from Mrs Gandhi. They had only to be told by some minor minion in the Prime Minister's closed

circles, what ought to be done. With immense tenacity and competence the order was carried out implicitly.

A typical example was Dev Kant Barooah who was Governor of Bihar. Janardan Thakur had this to say about his tenure :

Barooah put his heart and soul into scheming the ouster of the then United Front Government headed by Socialist leader, Karpoori Thakur. Indira Gandhi's 'dirty job man' Yashpal Kapoor arrived in Patna with a bulging brief case, parked himself in an air-conditioned hotel and started dialling his 'contactmen'. The 'Operation Toppling' was on.

Barooah lost no time in writing out a report recommending President's rule.

With the United Front Government out of the way, the Governor proceeded to work assiduously to promote the prospects of the Congress Party. In the months preceding the mid-term elections of 1972, the Governor toured the State extensively. Though the tours were ostensibly for administrative purposes, the insiders knew quite well what Barooah was really doing. Years later, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's fall, he boasted to his friends how as the Governor of Bihar, he had 'swung the balance' in favour of the Congress, how he had worked in the Tribal belts of Chotanagpur to wean the people away from the regional Jharkhand Party.

During the two years that he remained the Governor of Bihar, Barooah proved himself to be a man who was always ready to bend double to please his masters in Delhi. It was not only Indira Gandhi's commands that he followed, he even took orders from Lalit Narayan Mishra or Yashpal Kapoor. Forever willing to court the courtiers.

Barooah was not the exception. He had only emulated the feat, so competently performed by Chakravarti in Haryana. There were several other Governors who had played politics of power, had got entangled in the tussle between the Congress and the State Governments formed by the Opposition Parties, and had manipulated the strings of power to tilt the balance in favour of the Congress.

Chief Ministers became, like the Governors, active associates who held power at the will of the Prime Minister. Sethi, who was sent to Bhopal as the Chief Minister, spent more days at Delhi than at his State Capital. N.D. Tiwari, who was the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, provided, by his frequent jaunts to Delhi, food for a satirical expansion of his initials. He came to be known as NEW DELHI TIWARI. Other Chief Ministers fell in line with the prevailing trend. They were aware of their tenuous hold on the post. The slightest murmur of discontent from the highest authority would send them on a one-way trip into the political wilderness.

All decisions emanated from the Prime Minister and her coterie. Men were made and unmade, as it proved to be in the case of Bahuguna and Nandini Satpathy.

Those who remained loyal to Mrs Gandhi were protected. They could get away with anything. They could rule over their States like autocrats. They could ride rough shod over democracy. They could swell their coffers by corrupt means. Yet, they would be safe. The Godmother was there at the Centre and all was right with the world.

So long as the patronage of Mrs Gandhi was available, one felt safe and secure.

There were many scandals that rocked the country, scandals that revealed the deep-rooted malaise in the body politic. The first was the Gulabi Channa deal in which D.P. Mishra was involved. In 1967 and 1968, Madhya Pradesh went through drought conditions. Only Gulabi gram crop was unaffected. The State Government banned its export to other States. The gram dealers, who had no market for the product in the State, rushed to the corridors of power, seeking revocation of the order. This request was conceded, but not before a clandestine deal was struck between the political leaders and the gram dealers. The money that the dealers paid was not accounted for. It was rumoured that sums which should have flowed into the Congress Party exchequer were diverted into private accounts. No attempt was made to delve into the whole affair till 1972 when Mishra fell from favour. A commission was appointed to study the shady deal, but its report

was not published. Perhaps, by then, Mishra had patched up his difference with Mrs Gandhi.

The festering sore of corruption, in its ugliest form, was bared during the debates in the Parliament over what has now been filed away in history as the Pondicherry Licence Scandal. It erupted, threatening to engulf in its pulverising hold, L.N. Mishra, a member of Mrs Gandhi's Cabinet and a Congress MP, Tul Mohan Ram. It was reported that the two had surrendered to pressures from moneybags, that they had used their official power and political influence to favour a firm and to secure licences for the concern. It was implied that monetary considerations had weighed with the people's representatives in bypassing the relevant rules and regulations.

It was unfortunate that the debate in Parliament, which started off at a vigorous pace, fizzled out like a damp squib. The Opposition, which had clawed and roared and bounced with exceptional vigour, chasing the truth, suddenly lost their bite. The truth about the shady deal still remains shrouded in mystery.

Charges of corruption and authoritarianism were hurled against Bansi Lal, the then Chief Minister of Haryana, by members of Parliament and members of the State Legislature. 36 members of the Haryana Assembly and 121 members of Parliament submitted a memorandum to the President of India in February 1972. Mrs Gandhi sought the comments of Bansi Lal. Then she gave him a clean chit. The *Hindu* reported on 3rd November, 1972 :

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has reportedly assured Haryana Chief Minister Bansi Lal that no commission will be appointed to inquire into the corruption charges levelled against him by the Opposition, sources close to Mr Bansi Lal revealed here (Chandigarh) today.

In a personal communication passed on to Mr Bansi Lal through a close lieutenant of Mrs Gandhi, the Prime Minister has given a 'clean chit' to the Chief Minister, the sources said.

It was a 'clean chit' that Bansi Lal got. It was what was expected. He enjoyed the confidence of the Prime Minister. He

wriggled into her favour by extending all facilities to Sanjay Gandhi in setting up the Maruti factory for the production of a small car.

He ruled over the State like an autocrat. He tried out many experiments in weakening the fabric of democracy and in strengthening his absolute hold over the State. He harassed Press reporters who took critical stands. He denied transit facilities to distributors of newspapers, shut out advertisements of Governmental agencies to the publications that refused to toe the official line, even threatened a publication, *Chetna*, of demolition of its premises. He changed the nature and character of the Civil Service, disseminated the concept of a committed Civil Service, dismissed his Cabinet colleagues who did not accept the fact that he was supreme and that he was not bound down by the lofty idea of collective Cabinet responsibility, became virtually the absolute monarch of the State.

Favouritism and nepotism reigned supreme. There was no court to which one could appeal against misrule. The only court, the Prime Minister, had already promised total protection to her man in Haryana.

So long as Mrs Gandhi protected the corrupt, because they served her well, yet kept her own image untarnished, the rot did not turn cancerous. But when her name began to be bandied around, when rumours associated two major scandals—the Nagarwala Case and the Maruti Affairs—with her, it became evident that corruption cascaded down from the top. To the public, the rumours appeared like concocted charges hurled at the leader to tarnish her image. But, as the facts became more clear and evident, incredulity gave place to shock. Corruption, which had till then limited itself to the lower levels, had, at last, corroded the very fibre of administration and gained a tenacious hold over the apex body.

Mrs Gandhi became not only the shield for the corrupt, as her father was, but also became a willing partner in some of the corrupt deals.

The Nagarwala Affair rocked the country as nothing else had. It was rumoured that Mrs Gandhi was involved in it. When Nagarwala died in prison of a supposed 'heart attack', when investigating official Kashyap died in a 'road accident', these

rumours gained more credence. The amount involved, 60 lakhs, was substantial. The case had too many loose ends, as *Hindustan Times* noted, that worried the conscientious and excited the inquisitive. To quote the *Hindustan Times* :

Most people had assumed that procedures of withdrawals of large sums of money from secret Government funds by those authorised to operate them had been well-established and fool-proof. This is evidently not so. A chief cashier of 20 years of blameless service does not act impulsively on the strength of two unverified telephone calls however well-disguised the voices at the other end. The conversation that allegedly passed between Mr Malhotra and the 'Prime Minister' is incredible. If Nagarwala is demented then Mr. Malhotra must be unbelievably simple-minded too. Or was he duped because he was not acting entirely out of context? Either way does Nagarwala's confession contain all that is to be known?

From the Nagarwala case to Maruti may seem a far cry, but it was Maruti which brought out the ugliest aspect of power that vested in Mrs Gandhi. There was nothing wrong, as she defended in Parliament, about her son trying out an industrial venture. Sons of Prime Ministers too have to live.

The entire affair took on a shady character with the facilities provided to the Maruti enterprise, run by Sanjay Gandhi. There was a big furore over the allotment of land by Bansi Lal to Maruti, land which had previously been reserved for Defence use. The ease with which bank loans were made to the Maruti concern indicated that rules and regulations had been heaved overboard. When the production of small cars, which had been the main target of Maruti, got bogged down, the concern spread its tentacles to other fields of industrial activity. It branched out into Maruti Technical Services. It started producing road-rollers for which State Governments readily supplied orders. It began bus-body building for which it got orders without going through normal procedural channels.

Officials who failed to fit into the new system evolved by Sanjay Gandhi were shunted out, if not hunted out. Taneja, the

Chairman of the Central Bank, paid the penalty for not swimming with the tide. Dr. Hazari, the Deputy Governor of Reserve Bank, was moved out to an inconspicuous post. Mr Talwar, the Chairman of the State Bank, lost his post because he stuck to the rules of banking.

The credulous may believe that Mrs Gandhi had no hand in any of these moves. But the plethora of facts that have come out dispel such beliefs. Mrs Gandhi enjoyed absolute power. She allowed this power to be shared by her son. She stood by him in his very dubious deals. She did not demur when Sanjay interfered in the administration. She allowed him to have a say in policy planning. She tried to build up his political image. She saw, in him, a probable means of perpetuating the rule of Nehrus over the country. She nurtured hopes of an heir and successor in her son.

In this, she was taking the cue from her father. But Nehru successfully covered up his intentions, only let drop some hints about his preferences. Further, he could handle the projection of an image in a low key, but went about it with more meticulous planning. He introduced her into politics, gradually from 1955 onwards, helped her to become the President of the National Congress in 1959, watched her grow into a national leader.

But Mrs Gandhi inducted her son into the national scene almost out of nowhere, without any preparation. She allowed him to have his say in matters over which he had no mastery. She identified herself completely with him. She asserted that he fully reflected her desires and hopes. She railed at those who attacked him. She took all attacks on him as attacks on her. She took off the veil of propriety that should be worn by the elected leader, revealed her latent propensity to assert her absolute hold over the country.

Thus she moved one step ahead of Pandit Nehru. He chased power, but did not cleave through the barest minimum requirements of democratic system. He wielded his power with a subtle hand and gave room for Walter Crocker, one-time Australian High Commissioner in India, to comment :

Nehru kept too much power in his own hands and so in effect he encouraged bad habits of dependence. Cabinet responsi-

bility might have been collective in principle, but in practice, there was much more *primus* than *primus inter pares*, the position being made the worse by the circumambient mixture of sycophancy and flattery.

Mrs Gandhi moved towards the cult of the individual, identified herself with the nation. Naturally it led to the belief that her interests were identical with those of the nation. India was Indira.

The dismal drama which ended with the elections of March 1977, provoked D.P. Mishra, one-time confidant of Mrs Gandhi to observe :

Nehru's monocracy brought about, in 1962, India's humiliation at the hands of the Chinese. Indira Gandhi's absolutism produced the excesses of 1975-76 and culminated in her own defeat in 1977. What is more, it led to the eclipse of the Indian National Congress, an institution built by the sacrifices of countless Indian patriots and led by such stalwarts as Tilak and Gandhi. This Jawaharlal-Indira drama, with Sanjay as the final entrant, has all the elements of a Greek Tragedy.

Pandit Nehru unwittingly prepared the ground for the tragedy. Mrs Gandhi unhesitatingly moved ahead on her quest for absolute power, gave a twist to the dramatic events by identifying herself with the nation and with Sanjay, ignored legal niceties and democratic norms and pushed the nation into the abyss of autocracy.

## FOUR

# Democracy Devalued

There is something in the Indian polity that resembles the octopus. Infinite tentacles reach out and draw unto their folds any idea or ideology or concept that comes within their reach. Then follows the pulverising, conquering embrace. The frenzy and the intensity subside only when the foreign element or idea is moulded and shaped and transformed to fit in with the contours of India. When an alien concept is released after its absorption into the body politic, that all powerful force of India, it looks entirely different, something laden with many of the characteristics of India, shorn of all the frills and spangles of the original. It takes a new form in which there is nothing of the original tang or flavour. It looks more native than most native ideas. It is stamped with an individual streak which has no mark of the parent stock. It often swings to the other extreme, displays traits that are at variance with those associated with the original.

History bears ample instances of the felicity with which India had conquered the conquering races. The Greeks, the Mongols, even the British found that they and their culture and ideals underwent a sea-change when exposed to the powerful magnetic field of Indian culture and politics. Englishmen, who believed strongly in democracy, thrived in India and behaved as if they had authoritarianism ingrained deeply in them. The concept of equality gave place to racial superiority, reminding the historian of the religious and caste barriers which form an inseparable part of Indian society. Justice became attenuated, got weighted in favour of the rulers. Fraternity became a lofty slogan, to be preached by priests from the pulpits as a means of conversion of people to Christianity. None of the actions of the Britishers bore any semblance of the democratic tradition of which they were so proud. The agents of the

Mother of Parliaments behaved as if they were the direct progenies of some mighty dictator.

This exceptional change in the nature of the Englishmen who came to India points to the potent impact of India. It was India and Indian conditions that changed democrats into autocrats. It was the invisible force of India that set itself to the task of absorbing the intruder into its fold and of changing his basic nature to fit into the climate of India and wrought the change.

Democracy came to India through the Britishers. It came, laden with all that had given strength and tenacity and vigour to the nation. It had the sheen of liberty, equality and fraternity. It held out to the people of India, for once, hopes of a Ram Rajya. (Though what this term stands for is clear to none. Like the Shangrila of James Hilton, Ram Rajya is a paradise on earth. But, where it is, in what form and shape it could truly come to life, none knows). Euphoria filled the masses. Gone, they thought, were the days of slavery, the days of subservience. They were, at last, masters of their own fate.

The excitement which gripped the masses reached a high crescendo when the star-studded Constituent Assembly drafted the basic Constitution of free India. The elite followed with avid interest the debates and discussions in the august body. Legal luminaries, who were members of the Constituent Assembly, worked with consummate skill to weave into our Constitution the distilled spirit of the best in the democratic systems of various countries. They gave the call for a secular society. They balanced the three forces of democratic society--- the legislature, the civil service, and the judiciary. They provided checks and counter-checks to retain, through the vicissitudes of times, the essence of democracy. In its final form, the Indian Constitution looked immaculately perfect.

Yet, from the first election, held in 1952, under the new Constitution, it became apparent that the invisible force that India unleashes against alien ideas, was at work. It took a subtle form in the shape of multiplicity of political parties. The form of democracy, which had found its roots in Britain and had flourished under a two-party system, floundered in the new settings. The very fibre of democracy, that has woven into it the ideal that the

majority would rule, got weakened when there was no party that distinctly enjoyed the support of the majority of the people. The Congress gained steamrolling majority in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha and in the State Assemblies, not because more than 50% of the people threw in their total weight behind the Party, but because of the diversity of the parties who shared the total votes.

The multiplicity of political parties, flaunting socialist jargons and communist ideals, asserting their resolve to take the nation along the paths they had in mind, reiterating that they alone knew the road to redemption, hampered the flowering of democracy. It provoked Manekkar to burst out, rather rhetorically :

To those who consider the Party system the *sine qua non* of democracy, one might well retort : 'What is the difference between the Congress I and Congress O, or Praja Socialist party or Socialist Party, or, for that matter, the Communist Party of India, or even the Jana Sangh which has also of late been lisping socialism—that is a difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They all claim to be Socialists and their respective programmes, when translated into practice, would all look like peas out of the same pod, alike in content and character — with the large majority, the dumb, orphaned, illiterate poor no better for it.

The inability of the politicians in India to bring about a polarisation of the parties on the basis of clear ideas and ideals, which, in turn, would have led to the evolution of two politically viable parties, with well-defined programmes, weakened the fabric of democracy. After studying the situation in India in 1970, Edward E. Keilock reported :

India entered the 1970s under conditions of high political flux and excitement, but with little tangible effort devoted to policy formulation and reformation. All the democratic political parties have recently professed a need and a desire for moving towards the ideological left. None has yet developed an integrated and thought-out set of policies which would serve to define what they mean by a movement leftward. They are moving left, not by adopting and advocating (or implementing)

policies of the left, but rather by declaring they are moving left and seeking platform planks which will tend to affirm their declarations.

Such an approach seriously undermined the efficacy of democracy. Vague hopes, evoked in the masses, without a matching will to implement them and give them positive shape, fostered a sense of indifference in the masses. It also cultivated cynicism in those who saw nothing good in Indian democracy. For, as Gunnar Myrdal stated :

To legislate ideals without the intention of realising them is apt to breed cynicism and also to cause new elements of uncertainty and arbitrariness in the State when they can be implemented in only a few cases, but not generally. It also provides who, in their hearts, are against social change with a pretence that it has already been achieved.

It was pretence that formed the main prop of Indian democracy. Even the Indian National Congress, which held unfettered sway at the Centre for nearly 30 years and at the states too for most of these 30 years, ruled under the pretence that it enjoyed massive public support. None of the leaders was ever upset by the fact that he did not truly enjoy the right to lead the nation, that the Congress Party, at no stage in the 30 years of freedom, ever enjoyed mass support. None gave more than a cursory glance at the figures which drew out the lie in the claim to public support put forth by the Congressmen.

#### **Lok Sabha Elections**

No. of electors (in millions)	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971
Votes polled (in millions)	106	123	120	153	147
Percentage of Congress votes	45	48	45	41	44

Congress rule was the result of the multiplicity of parties. It was a hoax on democracy itself.

The blame for this sad state of affairs must be borne by every politician worth his name. Political leadership failed to rise above personal interests. The leaders in whom the public reposed their trust failed to submerge their personal proclivities. They did not realise the great damage they were doing to democratic institutions by failing to take the cue from Britain. They did not work for the gradual polarisation of forces, for the evolution of two major parties, which could have provided the people with the essence of democracy. They were led away by their lust for power. They were led astray by the obsession with the spoils of office. Every politician, when spurned by party bosses or checkmated in his ambition, turned away from the need to subjugate his interests to national interests. He took the easiest course open to him: he broke away from the parent body, formed a new party with his political supporters, and threw open the doors to similar disgruntled elements. Parties grew in free India like mushrooms. The freedom that the country obtained at great cost was misused by the politicians. They interpreted freedom as the right to split and to breed new political parties. Their unbridled growth diluted democracy, made it possible for the Congress Party, which at no stage enjoyed more than 48% of popular support and at one stage had only 41% of the masses behind it, to decide the tempo of administration, the shape of the economy and the style of the new order.

Gandhiji had wanted the Congress Party to be dissolved after independence. He offered this advice mainly because he realised the strange conglomeration of people, with diverse political convictions, who had joined the Party. They had surrendered their political convictions, worked for the great cause of liberation. Their patriotism was fulgent and potent. But, with freedom came the need for political convictions to hold sway and for well-defined political concepts to provide the bases for political parties.

Gandhiji sensed the need for the dissolution of the Congress Party. He wanted to free the people from the bonds of gratitude which bound them to the Congress. The people regarded the Congress as the instrument of national liberation. The tremendous

goodwill that the Party enjoyed, the Mahatma felt, would stand in the way of progress of democracy. He saw a brighter future for the country only with the dissolution of the Congress and the formation of new political alignments by former Congressmen on the basis of policies and ideologies.

The woes of the Mahatma are known only to other Mahatmas, complained Gandhiji once. His words got drowned in the excitement that followed the dawn of freedom. Gandhiji became a Good Samaritan whose advice became irksome, if not positively repugnant, to the men at the helm of affairs. The Congress Party tacitly side-stepped Gandhiji's demand for the dissolution of the Party.

The stage was thus set for the attenuation of democracy, for a redefinition to suit personal ends, an effort which culminated in the dark Emergency days.

Gandhiji wanted real power to rest in Panchayats. He expected every small village to enjoy the power to decide the course of its progress. He assumed that the Panchayats would form the nerves of the administration. He hoped democracy would grow upwards from the Panchayats to the State Legislatures to the Central Legislature.

What happened was entirely different. Panchayats became mere ornaments of democracy, bereft of the power to deliver the goods, susceptible to pressures from the Party bosses, torn asunder by the in-fights in the Party. The Panchayats enjoyed no power except those that came to them through the patronage extended by those at the helm of affairs of the States or the Centre. Under the pernicious circumstances prevalent—socio-cultural, economic and political—these village bodies became mere symbols of grassroot democracy, casteappeals, liquor and wealth holding sway.

The masses were taken for granted by the politicians, both in power and in the opposition. It was assumed that the massive illiteracy of the people did not provide them the discriminative capacity to understand and to appreciate the functioning of democracy. Emboldened by this assumption, political parties came up with manifestoes at election time which painted delightful pictures of the future. The Congress Party spoke, in glowing terms, of the pre-independence struggle, exploited the goodwill that the Party

enjoyed, held out, in successive manifestoes, a better social order.

All political parties, by and large, laid stress on socialism, on land reforms, on small industries and village industries, on the need to curb monopoly, and on a better deal for the millions of our people living in villages. Rural electrification, more irrigation facilities, more schools, more banking facilities were offered at election time. Yet, they were more often than not conveniently forgotten, once the grand *tamasha*, when power once again rippled through the masses in the form of ballot papers, ended. Promises added up to empty words, the jargon of convenience, of transient use. Foundation stones were laid for projects promised at previous elections, not yet fulfilled. Foundation stones gathered moss, became, once again, symbols of a stagnant and incompetent administration.

Pre-election concessions gave a new stunt to democracy. They were sops offered to the public. The politicians in power believed that the people were gullible, easily tempted by small offerings and occasional sops. Noting this phenomenon which got a fresh boost in February 1977, the *Democratic World* recorded :

The wonder, however, is the number of the current *volte faces* and concessions. Like sorrows, they seem to come not in single spires but in battalions.....Within days, the States have been instructed to increase the scale of rations 53 per cent, to reduce the issue price of wheat and milo and not insist on ration cards in certain circumstances. By a stroke of the pen, the country has been converted into a single food zone. In Delhi, where unauthorised colonies, mostly of the very poor, were being systematically bulldozed, it has been decided to approve of the remaining unauthorised clusters as well as unauthorised extensions to authorised colonies. Several States have decided to go easy on their family planning programmes : Maharashtra's bill which would have enabled that state to compulsorily sterilise human beings has been returned to it without central concurrence. Uttar Pradesh had reduced land revenue by 50%, so that 15 million small

holders might benefit; the land revenue rate was doubled only last July. In Delhi substantial cash awards have been given to Harijan Students. Its municipal corporation desisted from imposing new levies or revising old ones, despite a budget deficit, rather uncharacteristically. The Punjab Cabinet has ordered higher pay for certain categories of police officers. Several State Governments have loosened their purse strings to revise the dearness allowance of their staff or to release its withheld payment. Rajasthan has introduced monthly pensions for the old, the blind and the destitute. The number of national permits for road transport has been increased by about 60%. The Andhra Cabinet has decided that the urban land ceiling law would not apply to beyond municipal limits, reversing the earlier interpretation. Himachal has revised the pay scales of Zila Sainik Boards. A Punjab Minister announced a discretionary grant for the repair of a village travellers' rest house. There have been more awakenings, all in a good cause.

These pre-election bonanzas, offered by the ruling Party, were intended to bribe the voters, to sweep them off their feet and tempt them to support the Party again. The basic rules of a good democracy, which goes with the proper and timely implementation of welfare measures after careful and wise analysis of the implication of such measures on the economy, were given the go by. The long term impact of the financial benefits that were offered to the public was neither studied nor taken into account. For the immediate present, the Party readily agreed to mortgage the future. For boosting the chances of the Party, public interest was put in jeopardy.

Some of the benefits which the Party suddenly extended to the masses were those which had been hanging fire for years. Many of them had been rejected, again and again, by the Party as unadvisable and undesirable. The financial implications of the moves were reiterated at Assembly sessions and at other governmental forums. But with the approach of the elections a new mood swept over the ruling Party. The rulers readily agreed to anything sought from them.

The benefits which were suddenly handed over to the masses, however belated and desirable they were, carried with them the stigma of political expediency. They were offered as incentives to the masses. They cut against the requirement of impartiality in elections. They were expected to tilt the voters in favour of the ruling Party.

It was not only in February 1977 that such blatant violation of democratic norms had been practised. It had become an accepted pre-election tactics. The few months before every election saw a spurt in the implementation of much-delayed reforms at breakneck pace. Projects which had been shelved for long were resumed, with foundation stones and attendant functions, with the peroration of one VIP or the other, exhorting the masses to sacrifice their present comforts for a brighter future, promising the people a brighter tomorrow which would compensate for the travails of the present. People living in unauthorised colonies were promised all municipal facilities. The determination of the regime to regularise them was reiterated. Water supply to far-flung villages became a pet reform that the politicians mouthed. Rural electrification became the main plank of his pre-election pledge.

It was evident to political pundits that the ruling Party was exploiting its power to influence the electorate. They saw, in every public welfare scheme, introduced by the Government after the announcement of the date for the elections and after the commencement of the election campaign by the Parties, the new style of Indian democracy. There was no doubt that such steps diluted the strength of democracy, tilted it in favour of the ruling Party, and indicated the possibility of the continuance of the ruling Party in power for ever.

Some political luminaries, including C. Rajagopalachari, suggested solutions to this evil. Rajaji, who, in his last years, became a staunch critic of the Congress Party, suggested a Constitutional Amendment making it obligatory for the Party in power to resign on the eve of the elections. He wanted the President of India to assume power, to govern the States during the interim period through the Governors so that elections could be held in an impartial manner. When he proposed this reform, Rajaji had also taken into account the misuse of the administrative machinery by

the ruling Party. There were ample instances when the police force had been instructed to pressurise the voters to vote for the Congress candidate, where official jeeps had been provided to help the candidate to move round his constituency, where the publicity machinery of the Government was geared to help the Congress candidate, where the Ministers of the Centre and States travelled by aircraft of the Air Force, where platforms were erected for VIPs to address the public at the cost of the nation, where mikes and other electrical equipment were arranged by officials. All paraphernalia of the election machinery were mobilised in the service of the ruling Party, yet another blatant attempt to perpetuate its hold on power.

The Congress Party never indicated any desire to build up good traditions. Every criticism, levelled against it by the Opposition, was ignored as of no intrinsic value, brushed aside as the renting of piqued losers.

A sensible proposal, which had been aired from time to time, that the Governments at the Centre as well as the States should desist from taking any major policy decision on the eve of the elections or take any measure that would have long-term financial implication, that the Governments should work like care-taker regimes, did not find favour with the political bosses.

The ruling Party had another advantage which went with political power. This advantage had its origin in money power.

Huge sums were collected by political Parties for participating in elections. The funds came, not by small contributions from the common masses, but by large donations from industrial houses and business tycoons. Since the Congress Party was in power and therefore, had with it the powers to recompense the industrialists and the business tycoons in the form of licences and import permits, money flowed into the coffers of the Congress Party while other political parties had to be satisfied with minimal contributions from smaller and less affluent business houses.

In the initial stages, the Congress Party strictly accounted for money collected for the Party. Atulya Ghosh, who was Treasurer of the Congress Party for nearly four years, has recorded :

Finance was a sore problem with us, as it always has been

with all organisations. But, we had a definite code of conduct for raising funds and a method of strict supervision for its use. Ministers, in general, did not collect funds—even Jawahar Lal did not. The money was raised by the organisation and proper receipts were given in each case. Vouchers were kept for all expenses.....The audit was always done by firms whose integrity was above reproach. Thus there was an in-built arrangement in the Party which almost cut out corruption.

Yet, even Atulya Ghosh never denied that the Congress Party was the biggest beneficiary of the donations by the rich industrial houses. What he stated about the Nehru Era was that money collected by the Party was properly accounted for.

Money provided the much needed decisive edge to the Congress. Money operated slyly to take the true content of democracy. Money offered brighter election chances to the candidates chosen by the Congress. Money shut the legislature door to the faces of those who were more dedicated and sincere and competent, but who did not enjoy adequate financial support.

The Congress, though it consciously stifled any thoughts of indebtedness to the tycoons who contributed liberally to its funds, could not avoid the temptation to return in kind for all the munificence showered on it. Thus, corruption began to go hand in hand with contributions to Party funds.

The Santhanam Committee which went into all aspects of corruption noted :

The public belief in the prevalence of corruption at high political levels has been strengthened by the manner in which funds are collected by political parties, especially at the time of elections. Such suspicions attach not only to the ruling Party, but to all parties, as often the opposition can also support private vested interests as well as members of the Government party. It is, therefore, essential, that the conduct of political parties should be regulated in this matter by strict principles in relation to collection of funds and electioneering. It has to be recognised that political parties cannot be run and elections cannot be fought without large funds. But these

funds should come openly from the supporters or sympathisers of the parties concerned.

If even one family in three pays one rupee a year to a political party, the total amount of contribution will be more than what is needed for all legitimate purposes of all political parties in India. It is the reluctance and the inability of these parties to make small collections on a wide basis and the desire to shortcuts through large donations that constitutes the major source of corruption and even more of suspicion of corruption.

What Santhanam expected was political awakening among the masses. Only by such awakening would the masses have supported the political parties with small contributions and have taken away the shortcut about which the Committee spoke. It would have required the dedicated services of a cadre at the grass-root, ready to bring to the people the benefits that the Party could extend to the nation if entrusted with the administrative machinery, capable of firing the hopes of the masses. In the absence of such a cadre, most parties, specially the ruling party, smugly raised the requisite funds from business tycoons. It was easier to contact a few industrialists who had the capacity to contribute large amounts. It was more convenient to rely on a few than to spread the net wider and to believe in the dictum that small drops of water make the mighty ocean. The Congress Party neither had the will nor the cadre to take its message to the masses and to raise funds for election campaigns. It chose to accept largesse from the industrialists, holding out in return invisible benefits which were either availed of immediately or were held out for use at a later date.

Collections for the Party soared higher after the death of Nehru. In 1967, Party bosses collected large sums. Some of these sums were not accounted for. They were nibbled away by intermediaries. One of the worst scandals, involving D.P. Mishra who was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, popularly called the Gulabi Chana Deal, brought much odium on the Congress. It was not the clandestine deal that Mishra struck to raise funds for the Congress that irked the High Command, but his failure to render proper accounts of the amount collected by him to the All India Congress Committee. What was questioned was his

failure to hand over the entire amount to the Party, not the foul means adopted to raise the funds.

As the demand for money for elections increased, the Congress Party thought of new tricks. The Party lulled the critics by bringing an amendment to Section 293A of the Companies (Amendment) Act no 17, in 1969. By this amendment, contributions by companies to political parties were prohibited. It was hailed as a far-reaching reform. It was paraded about by the members of the Congress Party with much fanfare. They reiterated that the Congress Party believed in healthy democratic traditions. They asserted that the change would wipe out political corruption. They sang the praise of Mrs Gandhi who had boldly struck such a blow at political corruption.

While such loud exhortations were going on, the leaders of the Congress Party were busy evolving their new strategy for fund collection. With exceptional skill, they came out with the proposal to publish 400 souvenirs. There was nothing unethical, they felt, in seeking advertisements for these souvenirs from industrial houses.

This subterfuge fooled none. Political commentators saw through the game. Frank Moraes commented :

Contributions for political purposes are prohibited by Section 293 A of the companies (Amendment) Act no. 17 of 1969. Yet having this law enacted, the Prime Minister's Party is flouting it by promising to publish 400 souvenirs for her Party just before the elections. This is quite innocuous of course. But each page of advertisement in each souvenir costs Rs 2000. Can you add ? If you can, you will realise that one individual or business company can contribute Rs 8 lakhs to Mrs Gandhi's Congress by taking one page in each souvenir.....The Ministry of Company Affairs has gone out of its way to issue a certificate that advertising in political souvenirs will not be treated as a breach of Section 293 A of the Companies Act if the object is advertisement. Of course, other political parties have cashed in on the ruling party's shining example. But who is the principal beneficiary ? Millions of rupces will be collected by Mrs Gandhi's ruling Congress in the way

of advertisement charges whereas not a single company will have any object of advertisement in mind while making the payments.

The subtle trick of mopping up funds, under cover of advertisement charges for souvenirs, assumed further stealthiness when the elections of 1977 approached. The new style revealed how low politics could be reduced by self-seeking politicians. Souvenirs were brought out in large numbers. The advertisement charges were hiked upto Rs 10,000 per page. Funds were collected from the leading industrial and commercial concerns. But very few souvenirs were actually published. The souvenirs provided the cover for bypassing the ban on collection of funds by political parties from industrialists.

If souvenirs provided the legal facade for collection of large funds for the Party, there were other sly moves that did not even carry the modicum of legality. One example would suffice. Immediately after the Congress split in 1969, Mrs Gandhi's Congress arranged a session at Bombay. The session cost around Rs 60 lakhs. The Party turned to the sugar magnates in the country to finance the session. It was a request which the sugar barons accepted with alacrity. They discussed over the table what they would get as reward if they met the bill for the session. The deal was then struck, a deal that finally strained the common man in India. Sugar which was selling at Rs 1.30 per kilogram suddenly disappeared from the market. It looked as if a magic wand had waved all sugar out of the shops. When sugar became available once again for the public, it had truly become dear. It was now priced at Rs 3 per kilogram. It was the burden imposed on the masses, a burden which added further to the groans of the people.

The sugar magnates had looked upon their commitment to finance the Congress session at Bombay as a commercial proposition. Their investment of Rs 60 lakhs had enriched them to the tune of Rs 3 crores.

## The amounts that flowed into the Congress Fund during 1975-77

Company	Contribution	Company	Contribution
A C C	7.00 lakhs	Century Spng & Mfg.	18.77 lakhs
Crompton Greaves	5.50 lakhs	Greaves Cotton	5.00 lakhs
India Dyestuff Ind.	5.20 lakhs	Mafatlal Fine Spng. & Mfg.	5.01 lakhs
Nocil	9.80 lakhs	Standard Mills	5.00 lakhs
Raymond Woollen Mills	11.54 lakhs	Telco	17.00 lakhs
Scindia Steam Navigation	15.00 lakhs	Tata Exports	5.25 lakhs
Synthetics & Chemicals Limited	4.76 lakhs	Tata Finlay	14.69 lakhs
Bombay Dyg. & Mfg. Co.	8.05 lakhs	Tata Hydro Electric Supply.	7.00 lakhs
Dharamsi Morarjee Chemicals	5.07 lakhs	Tisco	18.60 lakhs
Golden Tobacco	5.00 lakhs	Indian Organic Chem.	5.04 lakhs
Mahindra & Mahindra	5.00 lakhs	Larsen & Toubro	7.12 lakhs
Garware Nylon	4.53 lakhs	Morarji Gokuldas Spng. & Mfg.	5.39 lakhs
Ferro Alloy Corpn.	7.00 lakhs	Baroda Rayon	8.22 lakhs
Mafatlal Industries	5.45 lakhs	Chowgule Steamship	8.16 lakhs
Chowgule & Co.	5.15 lakhs	Gwalior Rayon Spng. & Mfg.	14.18 lakhs
Jiyajeerao Cotton Mills.	6.48 lakhs		

The notorious Backbay Development of Bombay provided another easy means to mop up funds for the Congress. A memorandum submitted to the President of India stated :

The State Government discontinued the practice of allotting plots through public tenders and instead adopted the policy of allotment through negotiations. Under this policy, some builders were shown favours again and again and they were granted a number of facilities. Jolly Maker, Dalamal, Tulsiani, Mittal, Raheja, Gupta and Haribhai are among the builders who were favourites. In the Backbay petition case, the court found out that though the plots were purchased under various names viz, Supreme Premises Ltd., Pererana Premises Ltd., Paramount Premises Ltd., the owner of the three concerns was the same.....Dr Maker.

It is pertinent to point out here that all these deals were finalised with the 1971 mid-term Lok Sabha polls round the corner.

Then, till 24 April 1974 no further plots were allotted. In 1974, on the eve of the Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, the Government suddenly came out of its slumber. After a visit by Mr Uma Shankar Dixit to Bombay, the State Cabinet held a meeting and 20 plots were allotted again through negotiations. The whole episode was accomplished so hurriedly that the few builders who happened to be present when the meeting was held, were given letters of allotment on the spot. Thus the alliance between the Ministers and the builders caused a heavy loss to the public exchequer.

Industrialists found that there were other novel methods that the Congress Party had adopted for raising funds. 'Friendly' visits from Income Tax authorities, triggered off by pressure from the political bosses, to premises big of businessmen, acted as a catalytic agent. Money flowed into the hands of the Congress bosses. How much ultimately reached the Party coffers is anybody's guess.

Gentle arm-twisting brought ample funds into the Congress account. One industrialist explained how he was advised to collect funds for the Congress :

They had banned all political donations by companies, yet they would come and ask us for money. When we told them we could not give it and that we would have to answer to our

shareholders and auditors for it, they would tell how to bypass all this. The *modus operandi* they suggested was that if one was a manufacturing concern, one could ask one's dealers, whose number runs into hundreds, to give Rs 5,000 each, under the threat of cancelling their dealerships. They encouraged unethical practices which the unscrupulous used to tremendous advantage. This led to rampant blackmarketing in steel, sugar and all the consumer items.

Other Parties, bereft of the power to extend benefits to the industrial concerns, found much less funds available to them. The Congress often jeered at the opposition parties, stating that some of these parties received largesse through clandestine channels from munificent patrons from abroad. The Communist Party, at various stages, was accused of being financed by the Soviet bloc. The Swatantra Party was charged with being kept in a state of financial flux by the Capitalist bloc. The Socialists had their friends in the International Community.

No attempt was made to seriously study the impact of foreign financial help to political parties to find out to what extent the charges were just figments of imagination, how many amounted to plain mud-slinging, or which ones were based on facts.

There is a law limiting the expenses on election. But the amount allowed—Rs 35,000 for a parliamentary candidate in a major State and Rs 6,000 to Rs 7,500 in the Union Territories—bears no relation with the actual amount that is spent by the candidates. A political commentator drew out how low the amount allowed is. "Taking the average voter strength in a parliamentary constituency to be 5,00,000, it can be easily seen that the cost would come to a staggering Rs 75,000 even where a candidate does nothing else by way of campaigning, but sends a postcard each to the voters".

The Sarjoo Prasad Commission recommended the reduction in the size of the constituencies and the creation of a hierarchy of Electoral Colleges to reduce the election expenses.

It is common knowledge that in spite of the law limiting the expenses on election, people have to spend huge amounts in their election propaganda and for feeding and maintaining a

vast machinery for that purpose. That is inevitable because of the big constituencies from which they seek elections and in collecting funds in the name of the Party, the temptation to fill their own coffers is not easily avoidable ; that is also because they feel uncertain of their political future.

The role of money in elections cannot be eliminated unless there are far-reaching reforms in the law. The limit for election expenses fixed for the Parliamentary constituencies and the State Assembly constituencies should bear some relation to the actual requirements. There is also urgent need for politicians to reform themselves, to shed their innate tendency to play politics as a game in which honesty and integrity find no place, and to accept the need for moral rectitude. Recently, a committee, headed by Tarkunde, studied the problem in all its ramifications. There have been other suggestions and proposals to reform the election laws. These should be given statutory standing so that the role of money in elections can be minimised, if not eliminated. The present ceiling limits, which are flouted by almost every candidate, should be revised upwards. The *Hindustan Times* suggested on 12 May 1971 :

Other countries provide candidates and parties certain facilities in terms of postage and travel, or even in the form of outright grants on a regulated basis. Would it be possible to evolve such a system in India ? It is quite absurd that the single most powerful medium of information in the country, the radio, is not available for election broadcasts. Apart from the political parties, the citizen, as a voter, has the right to claim the widest possible facilities for voter education, in which the radio (and TV) have a part to play. In the last elections, a great deal of heat was generated on the issue of the use of IAF aircraft and helicopters by the Prime Minister for purposes of electioneering. The whole question of official modes of travel by the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and certain other VIPs obviously needs to be codified and placed beyond controversy. Again, in the last general election, voting in certain States and even in certain constituencies in these States was spread over several days whereas

in others the entire poll was conducted on a single day. The later procedure therefore would appear to be perfectly feasible and certainly tidier, and there seems little reason why this should not become the general rule.

In the absence of such healthy reforms, money became the most powerful factor in elections. The basic questions, which V.V. John, the eminent educationist and thinker, posed, are yet to be answered. "Who can afford to represent the poor people of this country ? The rich ? The corrupt ? Don't we need some other categories of democratic representatives ?"

The able and the competent found themselves shut out from the apex body of legislatures unless they knew how to play politics, how to placate the Party bosses, how to make hay while the sun shines. Even in those cases where such bright men were available, they found their chances marred unless they belonged to the right community or caste.

This was but inevitable and elections gave the biggest blow to secularism. Caste considerations weighed heavily with the apex body of all political parties, entrusted with the task of nominating candidates for various constituencies. It became an accepted, though unwritten convention, that the candidates from each constituency, as far as was feasible, would belong to the majority community. Thus, in a Muslim constituency, both the Congress Party as well as the Opposition parties chose Muslim as their candidates. In Christian constituencies, the fight was always between Christians.

Election campaigns saw the wide gap between precept and practice. The Congress repeatedly asserted that the interests of the Muslims would be safe only if that Party secured workable majority in Parliament and in the State Legislatures. Implied in this was a hidden indication that all other political parties were susceptible to Hindu influence. Such a charge, except in the case of certain avowedly communal parties like the Akali Dal or the Hindu Mahasabha, had no relevance to the times. Yet, this was a theme that provided one of the best missiles in the Congress armoury for winning over popular support.

The Congress Party in Bihar, during the election campaign in Bihar villages, asserted that 'the daughter and the vote are never given to one outside the caste.' In Andhra, in constituencies where the Reddis had the majority, the Congress propped up only Reddis, exploited the caste leanings of the candidates to full advantage. In Tamil Nadu, the Congress did not fail to capitalise on the anti-Brahmin cult which has wide popular appeal. In any tussle between the Jats and the Rajputs in Rajasthan, the Congress allied itself with the Jats in those constituencies where they had numerical strength, yet opposed them where they were in the minority.

The whole approach to elections assumed deep overtones of the unhealthy obsession to win by fair means or foul. The new style became evident as early as 1948 at the election contest between Acharya Narendra Deva of the Socialist Party and a 'Sadhu' for the U.P. Legislative Assembly from the Ayodhya-Faizabad constituency. The *Radical Humanist* reported :

A majority of the voters of the constituency live in the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad, the birth place of Sri Rama-chandra and a famous place of pilgrimage. There mentality is religious in the orthodox sense...A religiously minded electorate was asked to choose between a man of the masses and a man of God. They could make no mistake. Insidious propaganda, particularly pictorial, made it doubly sure... Towards the end of the campaign, the walls of the city were plastered with huge posters depicting the Congress candidate coming to holy Ayodhya and being reverentially welcomed by Hanuman. Another depicted him as sitting beside Shri Rama himself. Naturally the Congress candidate recommended by the highest conceivable authority won.

In a democracy, if political standing and commitment and ability to do good to the masses alone had been the criterion, Acharya Narendra Dev ought to have trounced his unknown opponent whose only qualification was his so-called spiritual attainment. Yet in the contest in which the name of the Hindu pantheon was introduced to tilt the scales in favour of the Congress candidate,

the man who would have really been effective in the legislature was kept out.

The Congress Party was always guided by political expediency. It did not hesitate to align with the Muslim League in 1959 in dislodging the Namboodiripad Government in Kerala. It readily surrendered its principles and fought along with the Akalis in Punjab. Alignment with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu was also dictated by the craze to win at any cost.

These stances of the Congress gave a big blow to secularism. It became the popular cliche whose real significance was lost in the pursuit of political gains. It was the slogan that was reiterated from high places and at national forums, yet relegated to the side at the time of actual need. There was thus ample scope for the gap between precept and practice to widen.

There was no need for the Congress to resort to caste and communal factors to retain the public goodwill. It was the Party which had led the nation out of bondage to freedom. It was linked with the charisma of the Mahatma. It was expected to live up to the teachings of Mahatma, to overcome narrow passions to give a boost to nationalism.

The Congress Party, however, failed to live up to the hopes it roused in the masses. It was unfortunate that the Congress lost its will to be identified with the principles which had been set up as signposts by the Mahatma. It became just a political party, too preoccupied with its efforts to retain power at all costs. Once this policy began to guide the Congress, it got entangled in caste and communal politics. It ignored the evil of the long-term impact of exploiting the caste feelings among the masses and thriving on divisive politics. Thus, the stage was set for the devaluation of democracy.

The style, evolved by the Congress Party, became the model for other political parties too. They realised that they could not hold their own against the strong, all-pervasive ruling party except by pampering to the baser instincts of the masses. They had no option.

Today, caste and communal factors play a vital role in elections. They are arrayed across the length and breadth of the

country, in postures of defiance, cocking a snook at the very forces which built them up, nourished them, helped them gather strength and momentum. The pernicious influence of these divisive forces lingers on. And if present indications can be used, gainfully, to gauge the future, it can be safely concluded that the divisive factors are here to stay, a cancerous growth on the body politic.

The Janata Party, which now holds power at the Centre and also in many of the States, has not as yet revealed its determination to fight the menace. Perhaps the Janata Party too is aware of the power that is latent in caste and communal appeal. Hence, there is a reluctance to match forces with these divisive factors. If such indeed is the case, the nation is bound to suffer further.

This charge gains clarity when we take note of the comment of the noted journalist, S. Mulgaokar, during the election contest of Mr Ram Naresh Yadav, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, from the Assembly Constituency of Nidhauri Kalan in December 1977.

Caste also has its political uses. I will not say this is a factor in the survival of casteism. It is more correct to say that politicians accept the reality of the caste system and proceed to exploit it for all it is worth. Mr Raj Narain, (the Union Health Minister), denies this because for the present his interest is to promote the electoral prospects of Mr Ram Naresh Yadav, who has selected a Yadav dominated constituency to earn his qualification for continuing in the Chief Ministership of Uttar Pradesh.

Democracy cannot survive and prosper unless all political parties join hands and make a bold bid to rid the Indian common weal of divisive factors like caste, religion, language and region. It can become truly meaningful only in a society where the individual is accepted for what he is and not for the accident of his birth that gives him labels of caste or community. It is in this quest that our political parties have failed. It is this quest that must receive the immediate attention of our political leadership, of our elite and of everyone who has a stake in the resurrection of proper

democratic norms.

Another malady which had weakened the democratic frame can be identified with the influx in politics of unscrupulous elements. They were guided by no principles, goaded by no desire to serve the masses. They gyrated into politics because it provided a ready refuge for self-seekers and power-mongers.

They drifted into polities in large numbers. They flocked to the ruling Party because they were after the loaves of office. They became more ardent in their exhortations of moral values and political ethics. Under cover of such exhortations, they eroded the very base of democracy. They wormed their way into the good books of the Party bosses, got elected to Parliament and to State Assemblies, and gave a new dimension to Indian democracy by changing sides with the effortless ease of the rat. They changed their political colours with the skill of the chameleon. They shifted their loyalties, wafting with every passing political wind, reaching out for every inducement waved before them, sacrificing even the slightest modicum of political responsibility, making Indian democracy a colossal hoax. They crossed the floor of the House without batting an eyelid. The menace of floor-crossing gained an edge with the new concept of 'Aya Rams' and 'Gaya Rams'. The phenomenon was seen at its worst in 1967. Manekkar analysed this sad spectacle :

The legislatures set up by the 1967 elections proved typical specimens of this new type of politicians who sold their votes to the highest bidder, changed parties as frequently as they changed their jackets, and by their rowdy conduct brought the legislatures into contempt and disrepute. The States were plagued by political instability, as ministries fell like nine pins and ministers played musical chairs. That blasted the hope of political polarisation and of evolving a 'democratic alternative' to the Congress. These conditions were responsible for giving a fresh lease of life to the one-party rule of the Congress.

In this milieu the old-fashioned pre-independence vintage politician, who valued integrity and political scruples, had no place, and intellectual competence and personal merit

were a liability. How many thousand votes does he command ? Is he a 'material' asset to the party in his locality ? How much money could he bring to the party coffers ? These were the norms by which a Congressman's worth was judged. A new cynicism crept into party politics. The elaborate doublethink-doublespeak disdain for ethical conduct became practicable for (a) once a politician was elected, he could, with impunity, turn his back on his constituency and behave as though he owned the country and cock a snook at his electors in the absence of any constitutional provision for his recall ; and (b) the politician was generally confident that with the powerful vote-garnering apparatus at his command, he could once again entice the illiterate electorate to cast their votes for him.

With impunity, promises held out to the public at the time of elections were forgotten. Election manifestoes were stacked with all the carrots with which the public, dubbed by a wag as docile donkeys, could be tempted to part with their votes in favour of the ruling Party. The Congress did not hesitate to indulge in acrobatics with words. The promises of a new social order, where poverty would become extinct, (*Garibi Hatao* was the catchiest of slogans), drew mass support like iron fillings to a magnet. Minor reforms like the removal of the special privileges and the privy purses of former rulers whipped up public emotions. The nationalisation of banks was flaunted before the public as the ideal panacea for economic troubles of the nation, and of the common masses. Faltering land reforms brought no real benefits to the landless or to the small peasants. Land reforms remained a potent weapon with which the politicians could lull public suspicion and win public applause.

Indian democracy, thus, got altered and amended to suit the special conditions prevailing in India. Its character underwent a sea change. Its forms and formats now carry the stamps lent to it by our political parties. The essence of democracy now carries a new flavour, exclusively Indian. This flavour has nothing to do with equality or fraternity or liberty or any of the lofty ideals that

go with democracy and promise the rule of the majority where the interests of the minority are safeguarded. The flavour that Indian democracy carries is one which has drawn from the strange melting pot that is India. It reeks of caste and communal considerations ; regional and linguistic bias ; the right of the elite minority to live on the fat of the land ; cynical disregard of the need for any action to bring about social reforms and to extend economic benefits to the poorest sections of the populace ; vague generalities and sweeping promises ; nebulous hopes of a distant, but bright future ; whims and fancies of the men in whom the public had reposed their trust ; and the vaulting ambition of political bigwigs.

Soon this unbearable reek became a floating stench. Authoritarian tendencies grew. Whatever little hope for democracy remained, dissolved in the vast, seething melting-pot of maladorous Indian politics. The cult of the individual came into its own. As a logical culmination to all this, Mrs Gandhi assumed absolute power in June 1975. It made possible for the dictatorial regime to work under the cloak of democracy.

The muck and filth that accumulated, over the years, and weakened the democratic frame, twisted at will to fit in with the desires of the leaders who lost all concepts of justice and fair play and revelled in playing the power game, taking the masses for granted, make many people wonder whether democracy can ever thrive in Indian conditions.

They forget that it is not democracy that failed us, that it was we who failed democracy. Democracy points the finger of accusation at all of us, looking us in the eye. Can we dare raise our eyes to answer the silent charge, we who are milling around in the dock of history ?

## FIVE

# The Elite That Failed

Democracy in India started on a note of joy and optimism. A blanket of euphoria covered the nation. Hope suffused men's hearts. Freedom seemed to make men out of slaves, men who would dare and act.

The dynamism, imparted to the nation by Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel and other nationalists, touched and transformed the masses. It lifted them up from the mire of despondency. It held out to them a bright future. It stated that India would chart a new course. The nation would move towards social equality and economic parity so that the newly-won political freedom would become truly meaningful.

This hope was built, not only around the charisma of the freedom fighters who now held the reins of office, but also on the intellectuals who knew the ropes of good administration, who understood the need for a free and unfettered press, who had the requisite talent to discover the shortest and easiest road to national progress.

The people looked to the educated elite to lend full and unstinted support to the national leadership and to define the shape and content of our democracy.

The Indian intelligentsia had grown, gradually. It was Sir Octavian Hume who had changed the very complexion of Indian participation in the administrative machinery. Till then, education was conceived to be adequate if it could produce *babus* to man the innumerable clerical posts attendant on a vast bureaucratic machine. The qualities of the mind and the intellect that the British regime sought in Indians were subservience, docility, absolute and

unquestioned obedience, matched with a capacity to fill the lowest echelons of service.

Hume wanted the situation to change. He pleaded for facilities for higher education for Indians. He countered the plea of some diehards in the regime who nursed assiduously the belief that Indians were fit only to occupy the lowest posts in the administration. He pointed out the efficiency and competence of the few Indians who had been inducted into the Indian Civil Service in the third quarter of the 19th century. He argued that Indians should be given their rightful place in the administration. He asserted that they should gain necessary experience in policy planning and policy implementation so that India could equip herself for self-government.

The impetus given to the cause of induction of Indians into the administration received a boost from Gopala Krishna Gokhale. His efforts paid rich dividends. The Indian Defence Services, which had kept Indians out of the officer cadre, finally relented and agreed to train Indians for the award of Commission in the Army.

These were changes that helped Indians gain an insight into the subtle aspects of management. The experience they gained during their tenure equipped them to serve free India.

In other fields of activities, in which there was little, if not no Governmental control, Indians, with the necessary education and skill, found ample scope for growth. Some of the finest economists of free India had their education in the London School of Economics and had realised the need for proper planning and perspective to give the nation a new sense of direction.

In the fields of science, technology and education, there were several Indians who had achieved international recognition, who could hold their own against the best minds of the world.

The judiciary in India carried on its list a band of dedicated, independent judges of Indian origin. They knew all the subtle legal provisions, understood the role of the judiciary in a democratic nation, were ready to build the base for a strong and independent judiciary in free India.

The Press in India had some of the most talented men of the community. During the last days of the struggle for freedom, the

press had actively advocated the cause of liberation. By and large, the Press had shared the hopes and aspirations of the people. The leading journalists were not content with reporting on political developments and commenting editorially on them. Some of them made news by actively sharing in the dramatic developments of the times, by acting as go-betweens in the complex negotiations between the Indians and the Britishers, by being the bridge through which conflicting views could be propagated and discussed and a wide measure of agreement arrived at.

The experiences gave the Indian Press an individuality. It evolved a style of its own. It marked a judicious mixture of prudence and confidence. It displayed rare courage in demanding freedom for India, in pitting itself against the British regime.

When Britain quit India, the nation was not bereft of competent personnel to handle the administration, the judiciary, the educational institutions and the Press. There were enough human resources with the requisite talent and skill and vast experience to take over the onerous responsibilities.

The future of India depended as much on the intelligentsia in various fields of activities as on the political leadership. The nation could move ahead only through a healthy and congenial blending of the political leadership with the men and material through whom the policies of national development were to be worked out and implemented.

Initially, there was some diffidence on the part of the political leadership and the civil service about the new relation which would mark their contacts. Some politicians expressed the view that the civil servants who had imbibed the traditions and norms of a colonial regime could not easily fit into the new order. The civil servants, in turn, had room to believe that the political leadership would not repose complete trust in them, would look upon them as Brown Sahibs.

Both Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel worked out the basis on which the civil service could get oriented to the demands of the times. They moulded the civil service, transmitted to the officers the favour and enthusiasm which coursed through them, transformed them into effective instruments of national apparatus.

Sardar Patel dispelled the lingering doubts in the minds of the civil servants :

You are being entrusted work of the greatest importance to our country. It has to be completed in a very short period of time. I have no doubt you will apply yourself to the task with zeal and accomplish it with thoroughness and fairness. Let me tell you that I have always been happiest when I have been engaged in working for the country. I am inviting you to join me today to participate in the same happiness.

The civil servants happily reciprocated the trust reposed in them. They built up rapport with the Ministers. They spoke their minds freely. They did not hesitate to ventilate views which did not tally with those of their Ministers. They shaped policy decisions by subtly bringing out the defects or flaws in any proposed move. It was their duty to offer constructive suggestions to the Ministers and thus to help the Ministers work out the final policies.

The freedom to advise the Ministers, however, carried with it an obligation on the civil servants to carry out, implicitly and confidently, the directives of the Ministers. Once a decision was taken by the Cabinet, it became obligatory on the part of the civil servants to implement the decision.

Such an ideal, however, brought occasional conflicts between Ministers and civil servants. Even Pandit Nehru, with all his ideals of democracy, could not brook views that often ran counter to his own. He set a trend that brought about, gradually, a change in the relation between Ministers and civil servants.

H.V.R. Iengar, who worked as the Principal Private Secretary to Pandit Nehru, studied the style of his Ministers and commented:

While Nehru was most kind and considerate to many of us in the services as individuals, we were not people with whom it was appropriate for him to discuss the pros and cons of the problem that was thrown up to the Prime Minister of India.

This attitude reduced the civil servant to the role of a docile and placid executor of the decisions arrived at by the Ministers. It stripped the civil servant of the primary role he had to play in

the administration. It was expected of the civil servant to speak out his mind freely and frankly. It was his duty to bring out all the salient features of every major policy problem. With his vast experience as an administrator, partly in the field and partly at the secretariat, he could assess the viability of every proposal.

Of course, the civil servant had to conform to the demands of the times, to attune himself to the aspirations of the masses. No longer was the civil servant a trusted lackey in a colonial regime, but an active partner in India's search for the wherewithal for democracy. It was as an active and dynamic partner in rebuilding India that the civil servant wanted to serve the nation. It was easy for him to assume his new role. He had, in fact, been responding to the call for liberation, been straining at the leash of British rule, waiting for the time when he could harness his natural skill and talent for the benefit of the nation. What better vocation in life could there be than making meaningful contributions to the welfare of a vast and rich nation which was all his now ?

Evolution of a healthy pattern to define the relation between the Minister and the civil servant, in the years immediately following independence, would have lent a little more grit to the civil service.

If the meaningful bonds between the Minister and the civil servant had been nurtured on the right lines and strengthened by mutual appreciation of the need for working in harmony, they would not have snapped so easily and left the civil servant a pliable instrument in the hands of every self-willed political boss.

As it happened, it was when the Minister began to approach some of the major problems facing the nation with fixed ideas and ideologies and pressed the civil servant to trim and to alter facts and figures and to project only that face of the problem that the Minister wanted to see, then the demon of corruption got a firm foothold in the wide chink that was created.

The death of Sardar Patel in December 1950 freed Pandit Nehru from the only political force that could stand up to him and restrain him from imposing his will on others. From then on, it was Nehru that towered over the subcontinent like a colossus. He imposed his views on the Cabinet and the civil

servant. Ministers of the Cabinet took the cue from him. They too began to assert themselves, began to expect the civil service to play second fiddle.

Thus, the tenuous relation between the two prime factors in national administration underwent a change. In the process, the basic rule of the relation that should bind them, defined by Mangat Rai recently, was given the short shift.

In essence, politician-civil-service relations are easy to define in a democracy and for the rule of law. The Minister has the over-riding right to determine policy—what shall be done, the priorities of his budget. The civil servant is only his adviser in this sphere, which role demands a high standard of sensitivity on each side; the civil servant must render meticulous, where possible scientific data on fact and implications; the Minister may ignore this advice, but would be unwise to not consider it and contain it before doing so.

The semblance of an efficient civil service was maintained, but its functioning slowly changed from honest and independent analyser of policies and proposals into that of a body of intellectuals who could docket facts and dole out recommendations that complemented the views of the Ministers, however unbalanced or unsound.

Everyone spoke about the prime role of the civil service, exhorted the civil servant to express his views without fear or favour, projected before the public an illusion that the civil service and the cabinet were fully aware of the need for compatibility between the two.

But, in real fact, a sort of commitment was expected from the civil servant. So long as this commitment was to the national interest, things moved along on healthy lines. But when commitment was given a new connotation, the rules governing the essence of a good civil service was lost.

The essence of this relationship, as conceived by H. M. Patel, once the Secretary for Finance to the Government of India and now the Finance Minister of India, was based on commitment, commitment to a different set of codes.

Commitment of civil servants must be in commitment to the Constitution and to the process of law, commitment to national ideals and generally accepted norms of behaviour, commitment to integrity and commitment to administrative and technical professionalism. A civil servant who finds out what his Minister wants to do and then advises him accordingly is a bad civil servant.

Civil servants must advise without any fear. They must bring to the notice of their political masters the realities of the situation and the legal and Constitutional implications where these became relevant. They must place at the disposal of the Minister their experience and knowledge of administration gained over the years and in different areas of governmental activities.

Having done this, however, they must loyally accept the decision of the Minister and must thereafter implement such decisions effectively and without reservation. They do run the risk of the Minister taking such forthrightness amiss. But if a civil servant is incapable, of this degree of intellectual integrity, he is not worthy of holding such a position.

A Minister does not have the right to give orders which are contrary to law or morality. But if he happens to give such an order, the civil servant should have the courage to stand up to it. A civil servant who carries out the order of a Minister, irrespective of its morality or propriety is not, in my opinion a good civil servant. If an action is indeed immoral ; unethical or improper, it is the civil servant's duty to say so.

Such ideal concepts could not survive in an age when ideology reigned supreme, where practical considerations had to be relegated to the back-ground.

There were many issues on which the civil servants boldly expressed their views, tried to shape policy decisions within the framework set by the Cabinet. There were some Ministers who accepted the advice tendered to them if such was based on reason and logic.

However, most of the Ministers arrogated to themselves the right to decide what ought to be done, when and in what manner.

They approached many national issues with preconceived notions and ideas. They wanted to be supplied with such facts and figures that sustained their views and refused to listen to opposing viewpoints. They had no time to delve into the pros and cons before taking a final decision. They acted as if they knew what was good for the country. They assumed lofty postures, asserted that they had felt the pulse of the nation. They ridiculed the civil servant as a vestige of the past, as an ornate symbol which did not reflect the mood and tempo of the times. They put down the civil servant with an I know-what-is-to-be-done attitude. They beamed happily only when the civil servant surrendered his judgement to the dictates of his political master.

This was a dangerous course. Rightly did an able civil servant, R.P. Noronha, note :

The politician is likely to pay more heavily for his aversion to unpalatable advice. Once he has established a reputation for not liking to face the facts, he will be told only what he wants to hear. When the crash comes—it always does come—we will be treated to the familiar refrain, 'The bureaucracy has let us down.'

The bureaucracy became the whipping dog for every failure. Civil servants were shunted around if they failed to read the signs of the time and refused to trim their sails to the demands of their political bosses. Initially, there was some protest, some resistance to the concerted attack on the prime role of the civil service. But the civil servants, at least a large number of them, buckled down. They became the proteges of their political masters. They reflected the views of the Ministers.

Those among them who resisted were moved out to insignificant posts ; or were harassed ; or were ignored in matters of promotion. The carrot-and-stick policy, pursued by the political masters, castrated the service effectively.

Civil servants, posted in some of the States, experienced the authoritarian rule of men like Kairon and Bansi Lal. Those who survived the one-man rule had either bitter experiences to relate or had lost their will to assert their individuality.

Those who thrived under the new set up, showed 'a capacity to understand the moods of politicians, an awareness of their unsaid desires, and the tact to win round wavering supporters of the boss'. They knew that these are the qualities which bring prominence and promotion to rising civil servants.

Independence of thought gave place to conformism. Conformism became the religion of the civil servant—at least of the majority of them. Those who refused to conform to the concepts of the times were pushed out into a political or professional limbo.

The steady erosion of the viability and strength of the civil service led to the naked expression of authoritarianism during the Emergency. It had become a habit with many civil servants not to question the wisdom of the steps initiated by the political bosses. Safety and security lay in implicit obedience, not in ideals.

There was a time when the civil servants could have stemmed the rot. If they had not split into two groups—one group, perhaps in the minority advocating resistance against any attempt to water down the range and purview of their powers; another group, motivated by personal considerations, ready to fling ideals to the winds to ensconce themselves in positions of vantage, close to the powers that be—the civil servants could have blocked any move to instill in them the new concept of commitment, not to the Constitution or to the laws and codes, but to individuals. But the civil servants too were mortals. They too were driven by the same passion and emotions and desires and ambitions that course through ordinary men. Their intelligence and acumen should have warned them of the dangerous course they were pursuing. Perhaps, like ordinary men they did not have the sagacity or will to realise that by surrendering their rights, they were not only sapping the strength of the infant democracy, but preparing the ground for authoritarian rule.

For, it was commitment to an individual that finally completed the rot and led to the eruption of the malady in its most malignant form. Nayantara Sahgal's words spring to mind :

It was known that civil servants were expected to display their loyalty to Mrs Gandhi and later to look smart about doing Sanjay's bidding, and that those whose stomachs turned at this

spurious interpretation of a civil servant's role, dropped out and were relegated to oblivion. We know that senior civil servants, some super-annuated, led the 'commitment' brigade rode the crest career-wise.

It was the bureaucracy which lost all its balance, brought untold misery on the masses, have autocracy the garb of democracy.

The civil servants, by identifying themselves with the political bosses, lost sight of their prime responsibilities. Once they had lost their sense of direction, they could be veered a round, by every political wind. Thus they became handmaids of authoritarianism.

Compared to the civil service, the judiciary remained unaffected by political consideration. For a long time, the judiciary acted without any interference from the legislature or the executive. Legal cases were disposed on the basis of the law in force. Where any move by the Government went against the basic ideals set forth in the Constitution, where any step militated against the Fundamental Rights of the citizen, the courts intervened effectively and restored justice.

There was a growing intolerance of the independence of the judiciary. Interested parties began to circulate rumour that the judiciary stood in the way of social and economic progress. It was ridiculed for not reflecting the aspiration of the masses. Some critics accused it of siding with the rich and moneyed class.

These charges were wild, not based on facts. The members of the judiciary knew their rights and responsibilities. They had to ensure that no law went against the basic provisions of the Constitution.

The judiciary got into the bad books of those who aspired for absolute power. Its independence ran counter to the ambitions and aspirations of the political bosses.

It found itself subjected to a barrage of attacks when the Supreme Court struck down the Bank Nationalisation Act.

This act of the Supreme Court was seen as a challenge by some members of Parliament. They failed to espouse basic rule that guides the Courts : an unswerving obedience to the codes and

clauses enshrined in our Constitution. And they have no alternative except to strike down any move that negated the Constitution.

One nominated member of our Parliament rasped out, 'If the Supreme Court can't change, it will have to be shut down.'

It was the voice of intolerance. It indicated what was in store for an independent judiciary.

It is painful to record the apathy that the legal profession showed, by and large, to this grave threat directed at the judiciary. But not protesting vehemently against the threat, by failing to mobilise public opinion against any move to dilute the effectiveness of the judiciary, the members of the legal profession played into the hands of the political bosses.

Their indifference to the fate of the judiciary gave the Government the courage to try out a new experiment in browbeating the judiciary.

This was an experiment laden with serious implications. For the first time, Government ignored the healthy convention of elevating the seniormost judge of the Supreme Court to the office of Chief Justice of India. The authorities spelt out a new theory which claimed, for the Government, the right 'to appoint as judges who, from the Government's point of view, have the most suitable philosophy or outlook.'

The theory propagated by the regime went against the accepted convention. The new theory lent to the Government the power to interfere in the appointment of judges. Not only was legal acumen a prime consideration for elevation to the bar, but philosophy or outlook too became essential. None knew what this philosophy ought to be—except perhaps a floating, fluctuating, ever-changing philosophy that tallies with the views of the regime.

Emboldened by the docility of the legal profession, the government struck at the judiciary by ignoring the claims of the three senior most judges of the Supreme Court when the Chief Justice retired in 1973. For the first time in the history of India, the claims of trusted, tested judges of the highest court were pushed aside.

The elevation of Justice Ray to the office of the Chief Justice of India brought out only infantile protests from the bar. There were

several options available to the members of the legal profession to express their anger and disgust. But they failed to unite. The bar itself was divided on political grounds. Political bias stood in the way of the advocates without realising the grave danger posed to the independence of the judiciary once Government played with the careers of the judges. They remained blind to the danger inherent in the assertion of the authority of the Government to play with the legal machinery. Most of them remained indifferent to the dangerous move. A few, who retained their stern and unflinching love for the profession, raised feeble cries that impressed none. They spoke the voice of sanity and sense. But in the tumult of passions, roused by slogans and gimmicks, sanity got blunted.

It must be said to the credit of the judges that a majority of them ignored the threats posed to the system and maintained their dignity in the face of grave provocation. They continued to interpret the provisions of the law without fear or favour. Of course, there were some who had an eye on the future, who calculated the benefits that would come by trimming their attitudes to suit the desires of the political masters, who brought about a subtle mixing of their personal ambitions with the rigours of their seats on the benches of the courts and cruised safely through the turbulent waters. But, such judges were more the exception than the rule.

The judiciary, thus, did not fail the nation. The members of the judiciary gave their judgements, ignoring the sentiments and feelings of the regime, sticking rigidly to their concepts of the law. If their judgements roused furores in official circles, if their orders were unpalatable to the regime, they did not bother. They were there to interpret the law, not to be an instrument of the Government.

Many judges paid the penalty for retaining their independence in an age when such notion was decried and held at a discount. Some judges were transferred away to distant places because they delivered judgements that did not tally with the expectations of the regime. A judge of the Delhi High Court found himself reverted because he held his duty as a judge for above the plums that would

fall to him if he tocd the line set by the rulers.

History repeated itself when, once again, the claims of the seniormost judge of the Supreme Court was ignored in January 1977 and a junior judge was appointed as the Chief Justice of India.

It is a debatable point whether the Government would have acted with such casual concern towards the judiciary if the bar had been vigilant and watchful. The bar failed in its prime duty. It did not stand up fully against the intrusion by the administration into one of the most vital branches of a good society. It could have stemmed the rot by tenaciously fighting against any attempt to cut down the freedom of the judiciary. It was a typical case of failure of the elite to protect the values they cherished. The tragedy was all the more gruesome because the chief architect of the devaluation of the judiciary was an one-time Judge of the Bombay High Court. Judas could not have played a more nefarious role.

There were Judas aplenty in the nation. They were there in every field of activity. One could spot them in the educational institutions, in the scientific laboratories, in the Akademies meant to foster art and literature. They thrived in the power vested in them. They started off, flamboyantly displaying their claims to the posts into which they were inducted. In most cases, they had proved their skill and talent. They were men of proven merit.

But the lure of high offices dulled their native talent. They readily gave up their intellectual pursuits because they had little time to spare. They had to play to the powers that be, placate the bosses who could help them to a larger share of the spoils of office. They formed groups and sub-groups. They resisted every move for the emergence of younger or more radical elements who could pose a threat to their positions. They played politics with the consummate mastery of politicians. Universities became the hot bed of corruption and nepotism. Student unrest became the order of the day. Vice-Chancellors had little or no influence over the student community. They had no panacea to the problems that faced the community. They lent their heads to every suggestion mooted from above. The curriculum became an experimental ground for the elite committees who were supposed to be capable of injecting a

new sense of direction into education. The life-style of the educationists did not provide a model that would enthral the students.

The same melee was seen in the bodies constituted by the Government to help national planning. Economists and statisticians discussed the pros and cons of every move. They aired high-sounding theories and picked and probed into each other without truly understanding the hard, immediate requirements of the nation. They came, loaded with their pet theories and ideas. Most of them were half-baked. They did not suit Indian conditions. They had been picked up by them, either from the theories which had been tried out successfully in a different milieu or from ideologies propagated by the socialists. Only a few among them could feel the pulse of the nation, understood the need to explore and discover a path that would lead India out of the mire of economic chaos.

Planning thus began to lose its bearings. Every time the Planning body at the Centre or the State got revamped, the Plan priorities and stresses too underwent changes. Certain basic assumption, luckily, survived. But the pace of progress was slackened because of the musical chairs that economists and planners played.

Scientific institutions and Research centres too became the centres of true research in the fine art of career-making for the employees. Reports of the original works of juniors being stolen and paraded as the work of their guides so frequently that it became the rule rather than the exception. Sycophancy found strong roots in such decadent soil. Senior scientists enjoyed immense power over the youngsters who were bubbling with ideas and who could approach the problems with a fresh mind. The seniors fully exploited the power vested in them to project their images. They looked upon their posts in the scientific and research organisations as stepping stones to more ornate and ornamental posts. Science got relegated to a secondary place.

There were some who remained dedicated to science. They remained stagnant. They dated science with fervour. Science gave them the pleasure of life. They did the work that justified the existence of the Centres of Research. But they got little or

no real recognition in terms of career promotions. They were the silent workers, the drones. None wanted to disturb them, to ruin their delight. They continued to slog in the laboratories while the alert scientists, with the right bent of mind to play politics, reached out for posts that had power and prestige.

The Akademies became the safe nest for those who had initially been inducted on the basis of their contributions to their chosen fields of activities. Once they found themselves entrusted with the task of spotting talented youngsters and giving them scope for growth, they became a law unto themselves. They expected, from the talented men, who waited for favours, absolute docility and complete surrender of the streaks of creativity to the dictates of the sponsors. Groupism reared its ugly head. Favours and patronage got reserved for the meek and the pliable. It was observed that India was the first country to enjoy the dubious distinction of making a significant Biblical prophecy come true : 'the meek shall inherit this earth.'

Meekness was what characterised the national Press.

Before Independence, the Press had been bold and defiant, had boldly aligned itself with the nationalists and lashed out at every move of the alien regime that negated basic human rights. It had shaped public opinion, drawn into the struggle more and more young people with dynamism and fire, strengthened the will of the people by giving wide publicity to the statements of the leaders. It enjoyed the freedom to put across ideas and proposals to the diverse parties involved in the negotiations and to act as a catalytic agent in the crucible of political changes.

But independence imposed on the Press a heavy burden in the form of conformity to high journalistic traditions and at the same time of offering full support to the nationalists who now held power. It was difficult for the Press to bring about a compromise between these two conflicting postures. It was difficult for most journalists who had watched and admired the role of the nationalists in the pre-Independence struggle to suddenly become critics of their heroes.

This conflict attenuated the nature of the Press. The towering personality of Pandit Nehru stifled critical notes. The power and

prestige that other Chief Ministers and Ministers in the Central and State Cabinets enjoyed among the masses muted the Press.

The once roaring Press, with its leonine defiance and determination, slowly became a reluctant critic of the regime. There was no longer that telling sting in the criticism, the sharp bite in the comments.

Even on major issues where it was evident to everyone that the Government was in the wrong, the Press chose to offer mild reproofs instead of scathing attacks.

There are several occasions when the pussilanimity of the Press became evident.

It would suffice, to drive home this point about the meekness of the Press, to quote the diffidence which marked the criticism in the national Press over the Indian stand when Russia sent its forces to quell the revolt master-minded by the freedom fighters in Hungary. Hungary wanted to liberate herself from the bonds that kept the nation in a state of eternal subservience to Russia. Pandit Nehru ignored the true nature of the uprising, refused to offer any comments, stated that it was a purely internal matter.

This indifference of Pandit Nehru was in sharp contrast to the eagerness with which he had passed judgement on the intrusion of Anglo-French forces to reclaim their rights over the Suez Canal which had been nationalised by President Nasser.

Both events happened in 1956, within a few days of each other. On one issue, India chose to remain silent; in the other case, she was most vociferous. There could not have been a more brazen example of double standards. This was obviously the policy of a myopic Government. Yet, the Press did not go full length in exposing the inconsistency of the Government. The criticisms that flowed out through the Press were mild.

The Press failed to discharge its duty once again when China overran Tibet. India accepted the Chinese action without much protest. Some China watchers espied the implications of the Chinese move. So long as Tibet stood between India and China, the possibility of a Chinese attack on India (something that was discounted in the glorious days of 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai') remained remote. But once Tibet became a part of China, the two countries shared a much larger stretch of common border. Since the border

was not well demarcated, since the border question was very much alive, ticking away ominously like a time bomb, there was all the more need for India to have stalled the usurpation of Tibet by China.

The Press criticised the docility of the regime. Some sections of the Press lashed out at the failure of the Government to foresee the situation and to avert the move. India had certain historical rights over Tibet as the successor Government to the British regime. India did not exercise these rights. Thus, willy nilly, India was quiescent while China marched into Tibet. This provided the material for criticism.

But the fusillade that the Press unleashed was restrained. It was clear that the editors were treading a very cautious path. They wanted to go full steam against the docility of the regime. But they were held back by past loyalties, by a reluctance to hurt the feelings of former freedom fighters, specially Pandit Nehru. Unable to bring about a proper synthesis between these two conflicts, the editors fell between two stools. They dared to hit, but were reluctant to hurt. No wonder, their efforts, in most cases, looked like sham shows, kid games being played to fool others, not to be taken serious note of.

When the threat from China, feared by many, became real in the fall of 1962, the Press showed some grit. But even during those days when Indian national security was in great jeopardy, the Press chose to roll out its armoury against one of the minor minions of the regime. It chose Krishna Menon, a political light weight, for attack. It was as if Menon had failed to prevent the tragedy, as if he had misguided Pandit Nehru.

The facts, however, clearly indicated that Pandit Nehru had all along underplayed the threat from China. He had kept the people in the dark over continued border incursions by China. The construction of a road in the Aksai Chin area had been kept a close secret by the Government.

Pandit Nehru held on doggedly to the belief that China would not betray him. He argued that he had done a lot to build the concept of *Panch Sheel*, that China fully subscribed to the concept and hence would not resort to armed conflict to solve the tangled

border problem. In making this assumption, Pandit Nehru showed a pathetic incapacity to read the signs of the times. He lived in a cocoon of self-deception, dallied in a world of make-believe. It came as a rude shock when China swept over the Himalayas and down into the valleys, heading towards the Indo-Gangetic plains, creating a wide swath of panic which sent shock waves before it across the country.

It was sad to see the ideas of Pandit Nehru collapse like a house of cards. It looked as if the nation would crumble under the Chinese onslaught.

The unilateral declaration of cease-fire by China came as one of the best gifts to Pandit Nehru.

The Press chose to attack the regime. Yet, it held itself back when it came to calling a spade. Evading the real issue, the Press went round and round in circles, aiming barbed shafts at Krishna Menon. It was his ineptitude that brought the Indian army down on its heels. He had failed to keep the Services in a state of alert. He had played into the hands of the Chinese due to his leaning towards the Red. These formed the basic charges against Menon.

But the main culprit, the man who had, by his misinterpretation of Chinese intentions, failed to avert the tragedy, rarely ever got any scratch. Once again the Press was awed by the all-pervasive image of Pandit Nehru. Nehru was the King ; and the King can do no wrong.

Such subservience did not go well with a free Press.

The Press ought to be a veritable pillar of democracy, the Fourth Estate. Along with the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary, the Press provides the most sustaining force of all democratic processes.

The Press in India failed to prove its worth by evading the real issue, by playing hide and seek with personalities, by avoiding any confrontation with the most powerful man of the age.

If Menon was responsible for the debacle of India, Pandit Nehru was doubly so. Yet, Menon became the whipping boy, the sacrificial goat whose immolation would purify the administrative machinery and would land to it the capacity to resist aggression from any quarters whatsoever.

The Press played a double game. It was virulent in its criticism of those at whom it could bark and cavil and scoff. But it kept itself in fetters, almost crawled in the presence of those who really counted. The double standard which the Press introduced gradually corroded its intrinsic worth, made the journalists self-seekers who dared not speak out their minds boldly and frankly.

They did not show consistency when Lal Bahadur Shastri bowed down to pressure and yielded some of the territory taken by the Indian Army during the encounter with Pakistan in 1965. Before his departure for Tashkent, in the first week of January 1966, the Press had hailed Shastri's reiteration that India would not withdraw from any areas she had gained. The tone and style of the Press reports indicated a firm resolve to hold the gains of war. Yet, Shastri, at Tashkent, bent over and went back on what he had declared publicly. Perhaps the pressure on him from the international community was such that he could not resist it. But he knew that he had let down the people. The feeling of failure nagged him and killed him within a few hours of the signing of the Tashkent agreement.

The Press toned down its criticism of the Tashkent agreement, hailed it as a great act of statesmanship. It was inevitable that there was a reluctance to attack the dead. But one can only make a guess that, even if Shastri had returned home alive, the Press would have readily condoned his action, forgotten all about the previously declared view that India would not surrender even an inch of the territory taken in the war.

How much more in the true tradition of the Press it would have been if journalists had managed to demarcate clearly their regard for Shastri from the immediate question of the validity and wisdom of the contract at Tashkent and focussed attention on the grand hoax played on the nation !

The Press continued its policy of playing it safe and thus lost its character. It failed to notice the serious damage that political expediency would do to the body politic if it was allowed to thrive at the cost of proper traditions and norms. It showed itself in poor light when Mrs Gandhi went back on her support to Sanjiva Reddy in 1969. The Press aligned itself readily with the winning side.

The image of radicalism, projected by the Government, gave the wherewithal for the Press to condone palpably undemocratic moves. Occasional notes of warning were sounded by senior Editors like B.G. Verghese and Frank Moraes and S. Mulgaonkar. But, by and large, the Press occupied itself with trivial, picked out non-entities for searing criticism, left the centre of power unaffected by its attacks.

Mrs Gandhi held out a threat to senior press correspondents after the Bombay session of her Congress in 1969. She charged them with giving a biased report of the old Congress session at Ahmedabad. She could, she pompously declared, talk to the proprietors of their papers and fix them in five minutes. It was a veiled threat. It revealed the direction that she had in mind. Yet none of the Press correspondents expressed anything more than a mild protest. The statement ought to have lit the spark of explosive criticism in the Press. It should have found Editors thundering at their loudest against the unwarranted intrusion into the freedom of the Press. Journalists should have demanded an unequivocal assurance from Mrs Gandhi that she did not really mean what she said, that she had no intention to curb the liberty of the journalists.

It is difficult to understand the docility of the Press unless the reasons are probed. Then, it becomes more than apparent that the so-called freedom of the Press had been willingly bartered away by the journalists themselves.

There were benefits which a condescending Government could confer, benefits which could accrue to the journalists if they remained on the right side of the regime. These benefits included allotment of Government accommodation at cheap rates, immediate telephone connection, foreign trips along with VIPs, inclusion in goodwill missions to tours round the world, assignments for talks on radio and television, inclusion in select bodies and committees with all the powers associated with them.

Most newspapers and journals depend for their survival on advertisement revenues. The Government, being a major advertiser, holds in its hand an invisible but potent weapon to control the Press.

This power was blatantly misused by the Government again

and again to bring recalcitrant elements in the Press to heel. The Press Council often stepped in to repair the damage, but as more and more power got concentrated in the hands of the new political bosses, not bound down by the conventions of democracy, the Press Council lost its capacity to do good.

The travails of some of the newspapers, like the *Tribune* in Haryana and the *Searchlight* in Bihar, the surreptitious manner in which Editors like B. G. Verghese were eased out of their posts, indicated that the Press was in for real trouble.

Trouble was in store for everyone, not only for the Press. The trouble was the direct outcome of the failure of the elite to protect democracy. In this connection, there can be no more scathing criticism than the one offered by Drieberg :

The transition from the nebulous parliamentary democracy to a police dictatorship in June 1975 was only a shift in the degree. For the 'excesses', the deaths in 'encounters' between policemen and insurgents, the inquisitions, the erosion of the basic freedoms of speech, association and of the press were all there for those who wanted to see them long before the official imposition of authoritarian rule. Press censorship, for instance, did not exist officially, but a combination of covert administrative pressures and the collaboration of editors and proprietors who knew on which side their bread was buttered nevertheless constituted an effective method of controlling this vehicle of mass communication.

The failure of the elite to prove worthy of their title, to arrest the deterioration in their character and mettle corroded all fields of national progress.

Nayantara Sahgal underlined in trenchant language the rot that had set in the Akademis :

I wonder at our Akademis, under whose aegis writing, singing dancing and pontificating continued under the Emergency as though nothing had happened. There were writers in Jail, perhaps other artists as well. Who would have known it with the top brass at the Akademis conducting business as usual, as though nothing had happened...This horrifies me.. For the 'intellect-

ual' or the creative person is supposed to be blessed with sensitivity, and armed with a passion to protect and preserve freedom and the dignity of his fellow man.

The rot had not begun in 1975, said Drieberg. It had begun much earlier, had been seen and interpreted by Rajendra Puri thus :

More difficult to comprehend is how scions of wealthy houses who have fattened on a century of plunder got reduced to snivelling sycophants appeasing authority in its wilful violation of procedure, convention, even order itself. One never expected from the ICS officers, the princeling ministers, the new luminaries of old families, the glittering crowd who fed on a hundred years of British rule and were groomed in English schools, the suave sahibs with clipped accent and impeccable manner, in fact all the bastardised products of the rich alien culture which swept through our land to sympathise with or even readily understand the inarticulate longings of the native mass untouched by modernity or affluence. No, one could never expect a fight from the members of the ruling class over policy. But one did expect some fight from them to defend a system by which they have done so well for over two decades of Congress rule in independent India, where an apathetic, ignorant public tolerated their excess and extravagance and chose to record its protest in overwhelming measure, by the peaceful means sanctioned to it by law. One expected from the ruling class some protest against the offence done to the code which informed all their professed values. .... But the ruling class wilted without a murmur.

Their wilting was inevitable, for they were rootless. It was the failure of the elite to leave the ivory towers, to identify completely with masses that made them tools of dictatorship. Cut away from the mooring of the masses, the elite nurtured the belief that what was good for them was good for the nation, that they were the final arbiters of the fate of the nation's mute millions.

So long as they were free to play their pet games, they did not bother what happened to norms and traditions and codes, whether

justice was trampled upon and fair play given the order of the boot.

They ran around in circles, clamouring for personal advancement. There can be no better analysis of the Indian intellectual than made by Akhileshwar Jha.

The policy of harnessing the intellectuals into government offices for nation-building work did more harm than good... The policy induced a strong inclination in the intellectuals to seek government offices and regard these offices as the highest rewards... Soon the intellectuals of the country wied with each other to grab the coveted offices by all sorts of means, fair or foul, in fact more foul than fair, which included bribery, appeasement, coercion, concession etc. depending upon the need of the hour. The promotion to higher ranks was no longer determined by the work done and recognition won in the national and international community of intellectuals. It went, as Iago says ironically to Othello, by prefcment, personal whim and strong self-interest. Lecturers in colleges clamoured to become professors in the universities, professors manipulated to become vice-chancellors and vice-chancellors ministers. Writers were not satisfied with writing and yearned to join departments of government publications or administrative offices in the AIR. Men of the judiciary waited patiently to be tipped for the chairmanship of various commissions. Newspaper correspondents and editors enjoyed becoming ambassadors. Even scientists concerned themselves more with being included in government-sponsored delegations and with obtaining high posts in government agencies than with the laboratory work they were required to do.

The intellectual in India has been more concerned with his narrow field of specialisation, has looked upon his field as the stepping stone to administrative powers and political leverage. He has used even the power of protest against established order only to press his claim for admission into the citadels of power. He has not hesitated to surrender his common sense at the altar of power so long as such an action gave him more economic benefits, better

official status. In other words, he has not hesitated to push everything he holds dear into the background so long as he has access to the spoils of office.

It is the inability of the elite, by and large, to shed their personal ambitions and selfish desires, that has played havoc with Indian society. They can not escape a major share of the guilt for the nation's plight today.

## SIX

# Organised Loot

Freedom brought with it immense responsibilities, onerous duties, new challenges and expanding opportunities.

The hopes of millions of Indians, illiterate, exploited, living in a state of abject poverty, brightend. Freedom symbolised to them the dawn of a new social order, the promise of a better way of life. They saw in political freedom a harbinger of material progress, of better living conditions. They expected the wide material distance between the deprived and the comfortable, the affluent, to reduce gradually and to disappear over a period of time, India, they thought, was ready to break away from the constraints of the past and to steer a course that would sound the death knell of prejudices based on caste and community and religion, and give the clarion call for the reshaping of India on modern lines. Only by treading such a path could India make up for years of stagnation under alien rule and become truly independent. Only such an approach would solve the myriad problems which gnawed into the very roots of the nation and take it faster towards the goal set by Pandit Nehru and others. \*

The first Prime Minister of free India repeatedly stressed that he would bring in radical land reforms and ensure that more and more landless villagers got a share of the land held by big landlords. He reiterated the need for equitable redistribution of resources. He hinted at rapid growth in rural employment. He warned anti-social elements, including black-marketeers and hoarders, of severe punishment if they continued to nurse their personal ambitions which went against national interests. With defiance, he set out the need for a new population policy which would bring

down the growth of India's teeming millions into a manageable size, and included family planning in the national programme.

The pace set by Pandit Nehru looked ideal for India. The sense of elation which gripped the nation countered, at least in the initial stages, corruption and nepotism. Expectations, roused by freedom, welled up in every Indian. These expectations found expression through the determination and dedication of the political leaders, the civil servants, the planners and the engineers and other elite sections of the populace, and set the tone for social reformation.

The first objective of the government, in the primarily agricultural country, was to attain self-sufficiency in food. With this in view, a number of major irrigation projects were undertaken. The Green Revolution was anticipated with the water that was channelised into parched lands, for reclaiming more dry, uncultivated land under the till. The investment in irrigation was expected to make India self-sufficient in food within a decade.

Pandit Nehru was not satisfied with making a determined drive in giving a new momentum to agriculture alone. He had grandiose schemes for industrialisation of the country. During his visits to Europe, he had been impressed by the economic rejuvenation brought about by industrialisation. He thought of the industrial miracle, especially of post-War Germany, and these thoughts shaped his policies.

The Government gradually turned away from the Gandhian ideology of small-scale and cottage industries. Faith in the capacity of these two forms of industry to deliver the goods was formally affirmed. But it was stated that these two sectors could only play a minor role in taking the country faster on the road to modernisation. It was argued that only heavy industries could really cope with the demands of the nation. There was adequate support for this view from the leading economists and planners of India. There was tacit acceptance of the view that unless India could push ahead with heavy industries, unless she could augment her steel output, she would continue to sink in the morass of grim poverty. This acceptance marked the shift.

The steel plants which sprung up, under the public sector,

promised to bring the fruits of industrialisation to the people. It was a move in the right direction. If the policy of industrialisation had been blended with the requirements of the nation, it would have brought real benefits to the people.

However, at some stage in the policy planning, the central core of planning underwent a change. It was forgotten that the people form the core of any planning. Planning became more important than the people. The subtle variation, that the planners could concoct with the available parameters thrilled them. They began to play the game of figures. stunning, impressive and staggering figures, the old empty splendour of statistics. While they played this game, the men who were to benefit by such exercises receded into the background.

This change came, gradually, almost imperceptibly. It made the whole process of planning tilt in favour of the upper class and the middle class. The fundamental principle of planning in India the percolating of real economic benefit to the level of the poorest sections of the populace, was somehow lost sight of.

It is difficult to decide who brought about this shift. The planners were brimming with ideas and theories to fit into the dictates of the political bosses. They had enough erudition to substantiate any action, to justify any move. They were quick to realise that their hold on the levers of power and planning depended, to a large extent, on the patronage of the political leadership. This awareness, which was seeping through other sections of intellectuals too, warped the judgement of people, made them more pliable and quiescent.

The political leadership was happy when ideas put forth found ready acceptance from the planners and the intellectuals in position. Many of the leaders prided themselves on their understanding of the people and their problems. They pompously aired the view that what they did not know of India was not worth knowing. They asserted they were practical men. They acted in a manner which substantiated the statement of Keynes :

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economists. Mad men in authority, who hear voices

in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.

Theories were floated to justify industrialisation, theories which had all the fillings of logic. The theories, in most cases, were infallible. Yet, they went wrong because theories were more often than not forced to bend to the demands of the men who handled them. Forcibly bent and altered and amended, the theories, which should have led the nation faster towards economic equality, shifted the direction of progress and took it away from the goal.

Industrialisation, by itself, was necessary, and desirable. If increased output of steel had provided the wherewithal for setting up of new factories to produce agricultural implements and building material and defence equipment and tools and weapons and arms, there could have been no ground for grouse.

But the tilt, brought in the economic planning by the pressure of the influential rich and middle classes, paved the way for wastage of vital resources on projects of secondary importance. Industrialists were allowed to enter into collaboration with foreign concerns for sharing technical knowhow for production of luxury items like air conditioners and fridges, cars and scooters. The obsession with foreign collaboration became so acute that technical knowhow for producing even talcum powder and pomades and lipstick was imported. Even the most popular soft drink of the affluent came to India from abroad.

This shift came because of various reasons.

It began with the gradual ebbing away of the vitality and vigour that seethed through the nation immediately after independence. Almost imperceptibly, the idealism of the past gave way to the relentless thrust of personal ambitions and desires.

Self-seeking politicians moulded rules and regulations to subserve their interests. Their desires to hold on to power, at any cost, changed the whole gamut of political development. It brought, in its wake, a steely-eyed awareness among the politicians of the power that money held. Money was vital to reach the masses with the message of the Party. Money alone could provide the men and the material to fight the electoral battle. Money could, in some cases, even buy votes.

The politicians did not have money. They could, however,

command money from big business houses and from the industrialists.

Industrialists had been financing the national leaders even before freedom. They had provided funds for Gandhiji, Jayaprakash Narayan and other leaders. They had, according to the recent book of M. O. Mathai recollecting his days with Nehru, all lived on the munificence of the industrialists. The only exception was Pandit Nehru.

In the first flush of independence, there was a vague indication that the political leaders would break away from the past, sever all financial contacts with the industrialists, maintain the utmost rectitude.

But, as the realities of the situation dawned on them, they turned for money to the industrialists. The captains of industry were, after all, always there to turn to.

In the initial stages, the money collected from business houses was minimal. All collections were properly accounted for.

Even as the goodwill enjoyed by the Congress Party began to dwindle, it became imperative for the Party to prop itself up with money power. Only through money could the Congress leaders retain their grip on the levers of power.

The price to be paid for such power would have to be a heavy one.

The dependence of the Congress Party for funds on the industrialists, made the latter realise their role in the new order. They readily financed the Party, contributing liberally to its election funds. They kept themselves free from the charge of pampering the ruling Party by doling out trifling sums to the Opposition Parties too. They could not be accused of being hand in glove with any ideology. The implicit statement was that they were above political considerations.

Simultaneously, the industrialists set down their price for financing the Congress Party. The price came in the form of requests for import permits, for industrial licences, for production rebates and for export incentives. This was to be their pound of flesh. The political leadership maintained the outward facade of rules and regulations, yet circumvented them to extend patronage to their patrons.

In an incisive study of the role of big industrial houses, A.N.

Oza, of Bombay University recently noted :

In India, under Congress rule, the relationship between the Government and big business has been confusing for the ordinary citizen. Nehru and Indira Gandhi have been acclaimed by Congressmen as well as the intelligentsia for their anti-big business attitude. But, it was during their regime that big business prospered most. Similarly, throughout Congress rule, the political posture of the Government was one of the suspicion of the power of big houses and foreign companies because of their sizes. But, in its efforts to step up industrial investment and growth, the Congress Government never failed to fall back upon the large business houses and multinationals, precisely for the advantages they enjoy in terms of their size and command over resources. The result was that the big houses and large foreign companies were allowed to turn to their own advantage those very policy measures which were introduced to control their growth.

The most glaring example of how big business has exercised its economic power to influence Government policies is provided by the working of the policy for the licencing of industrial investment. One of the primary objectives of this policy is the avoidance of concentration of economic power. However, in reality this policy has been instrumental in increasing the growth of concentration...(From 1956 to 1968), the twenty big business houses secured a disproportionately large share both in the number of licences issued and the value of investment licenced. The share of the top twenty houses in the number of licences issued was 20%, but, in the amount of investment licenced their share was 41%. Also, whereas only 20% of the applications from the twenty big houses were rejected, the proportion of rejection of the non-big house applications was 66%.

The industrial magnates kept up pressure on the political bosses, some of whom received regular remittances from the business tycoons. Many supposedly in-camera decisions of the Central Cabinet reached trade circles within hours. The information channel which they maintained with the various levels of administration helped them to side-track any move to subvert their

interests and to press, at the right time, for the price they should get for the munificence shown by them to the Congress Party.

To quote A. N. Oza again :

In the matter of issuing licences, the big houses are also shown special favours in many ways. These are (i) Early intimation. Particular parties are intimated and approached in advance about certain projects and asked to apply accordingly after it is already approved. (e.g., aluminium project of Birlas) (ii) Listing of 'ban' on the licencing of new capacity for particular products to suit particular applicants, mainly belonging to big houses, (e.g. calcium carbide product of Shri Ram). (iii) Expeditions disposal. While most applications take months and years for final decision, application from certain favoured parties are disposed of at a great speed under definite instructions 'from above'. A classic example of this is the application from the foreign party (Purc Drinks) for production of soft drinks which was granted licence within just one day. (iv) Inadequate scrutiny. Licences were granted to certain big houses for certain products without adequate scrutiny. e.g., Rayon products of Birlas, Superphosphate projects of Kasturbhai (v) 'On File' decision. That is, decision outside the normal procedure of the Licencing Committee. About 50 applications from big houses were favourably decided in this way. (e.g., wire products project of Banjur)

In all these, the hidden band of money power is evident. The big industrialists thrived under the new order. They enjoyed exclusive production rights on many essential commodities. They also controlled the supply of the commodities. They manipulated the market to augment their profits. (One example quoted elsewhere in this book brings out how the sugar magnates hiked the price of open marked sugar from Rs. 1.25 a kilogram to Rs. 3.50 after financing a session of Indira Gandhi after the 1969 split). They got away with tactics which cut at the economic base of the common man. They swelled their profits while the poor sank lower and lower into the economic abyss.

Money power gave them a stranglehold over the nation. They controlled the politicians. They 'bought' the civil servants. They

owned the Press, and often, tacitly rather than openly, exploited the medium to gain their ends.

The industrial tycoons enjoyed the facilities at their disposal. They engaged the best brains in the country, paying fabulous wages and perquisites. The managerial talent, employed by them, was harnessed, partly to ensure effective production and to maximise profits, partly to act as a bridge to the politicians and the civil servants to enable them to negotiate clandestine deals and strike bargains.

With the advent and then predominance of money power, the value system which was expected to guide India after freedom became archaic. The common man, the Indian living below the poverty line, comprising around 60% of the population, was forgotten. New burdens were thrust upon him as all wealth was mopped up by industrialists and politicians. By tacit arrangement they increased prices, even of essential commodities, and thus pushed more and more people below the poverty line. The Indian, poor and exploited, groaned under the weight of the enormous price-rise. He could not fight this organised loot by big business houses.

Money became the driving force of labour, too. They could not wriggle out from the temptation to get their share of the loot. Most of them sprung from the poorest section of the populace. But the power which flowed into them, as a result of regular wages, transformed them. The change was slow, in the beginning. The process continued till the alienation became complete. There was not even the slightest vestige of their links with the very strata from which they had sprung. They had made a break from the past, from the clutches of poverty, from the pangs of hunger. Money had released them from the fetters of deprivation. It held out to them the lures of comfort, nay, even of luxury. It drew them into the game that men play to corner larger chunks of money unto themselves. In this attitude, there was no reckoning of the fact that the country's resources were limited, that a larger share of the assets to one or two and a few sections of the populace would hit those who were in no conceivable position to secure even a microscopic amount of the loot. If the claim for an increased share had come with increased production on the industrial front, perhaps the nation would not have been driven into a state of despair.

It was unfortunate that labour and management were more concerned about immediate gains. Production was taken into account only as a side issue. In some cases, both parties found it to their advantage to reduce production so as to manipulate the prices and to earn more profits. In the process, the nation became poorer.

Speaking about the productivity movement in India, the *Democratic World* noted, in its editorial of 14 November 1976 :

The paradox of productivity is that the worker is not easily persuaded about the worthwhileness of increasing the ratio between output and input...In India, the productivity movement is years old. But, barring a few enterprises, its impact has been invisible, as a comparison of domestic performance with international norms would show...Generally production increase have occurred more through expansion of capacity than by producing more at the same cost or the same amount at less cost.

The main reason for this is not far to seek. We lack a cogent philosophy, of whatever kind, for sharing the gain to the community as a whole from higher productivity, indeed for sharing the fruits of labour; what kind of balance is to be struck between strengthening the foundations of future economic growth, providing larger supplies of goods at lower costs and lower prices and improving the real earnings and living conditions of the worker. If these are not harmonised in a national system, they will compete in open conflict or work silently at cross purposes. \*

If productivity had guided the moves of industrial magnates and labour, the nation's economy would have become buoyant. Increased productivity would have made more goods available for public consumption at reasonable prices. The purchasing power of the masses, backed by tangible goods, would not have been eroded.

This would, in turn, have finally brought richer dividends to the industrialists and the labour. Prices would not have shown such steep rise. Inflation would not have eroded their savings.

Unfortunately, the tendency was, by and large, to put in

minimum amount of work and reap richer harvests. This resulted in inflation. Inflation whipped up demands for higher wages, more allowances to negate the impact of price rise. When these were met, prices soared further. Thus, the nation got caught in the vicious price spiral which was fanned by the aggressive demands of the section which could hold the nation to ransom.

In leading the nation in to this tangle, the trade unions cannot escape their share of guilt. Trade unions in India closely followed the pattern of those in Britain. Paul Johnson saw the trade unions as 'brotherhood of national misery.' He commented :

The trade union is a product of 19th century capitalism... Against powerful, highly-organised, and ruthless capitalist forces, it had an essential, even noble part to play. But when these forces are disarmed, when they are in headlong retreat, the union has no function to perform. The trade union movement may be dressed up with economic committees and so forth ; but its only purpose is to bargain for better wages within all-powerful capitalist system. The British trade union movement has now been taken out of that context and placed in an entirely new one. Yet, it is still carrying on ; doing the only thing it knows how to do—ask for higher wages. As it is for all practical purposes the State, it naturally gets them. A subject government prints the notes, and the result is inflation on an unprecedented scale. British trade unionism has thus become a formula for national misery.

The charge, made by Johnson against the trade unions of Britain, is largely valid when applied to India. Collective bargaining was used as a weapon to corner more economic benefits for labour. In most cases, this led to increase of poverty among the less organised or unorganised sections of the populace. Society found it difficult to contain the excessive demands of labour. The nation was threatened with strikes, gheraos, lockouts, go-slow moves and other weapons of collective-bargaining against which there can be no effective counter-move.

The parallel drawn between the situation in India and that in Britain needs stressing. Paul Johnson has portrayed the evil impact of trade unionism in Britain thus :

We call the process collective-bargaining, but it is really nothing of the sort...The logic, indeed, is that the most powerful must get the most money all along the line. This is not socialism...Free collective-bargaining necessarily excludes huge sections of society. They are not organised. They cannot be organised. Rapid inflation inflicts the greatest possible suffering on the very poor, the old, the very young, the sick, the helpless, the physically and mentally handicapped, all the outcasts and misfits and casualties of society. Collectively they number millions. Collectively, from the trade union point of view, they are powerless. They cannot, like miners, power workers, railwaymen, businessmen and so forth, make the life of society miserable, damage its wealth and so force authority to surrender...Just as the underprivileged suffer from wage inflation, so they are nearly always the most exposed victims of the strikes inflicted on the community to enforce inflationary settlements. The rich always have ways of escaping the worst consequences of strike action. They have alternative means of transport or fuel : they can pay over the odds, and bribe or bully their way out of strike situations. They do not have to struggle to work, or suffer in angry ; impotent silence. If they choose, they can just take a holiday. It is the poorer groups who are utterly dependent on public transport and public services, who have no store cupboards or reserves, and who are the first to feel the deprivation which strikes are deliberately intended to inflict.

Indian labour failed to realise the great damage that they did to the nation by holding their interests as supreme by relegating national interests to the rear. The loss, each year, of millions of man-hours due to strikes, can never be properly gauged. The nation can ill-afford such loss. Yet, it is this loss that is continuously inflicted on the nation by the organised sector of labour.

In 1970 alone, India lost 19 million man-days due to labour trouble. It led to slack production, idle industrial capacity, price-wage spiral, low productivity and growing unemployment. Pressing for the need for a better industrial climate, the *Hindustan Times* recorded in its editorial of 15 May 1971 :

It has been made to appear that labour and management are irrevocably ranged against one another and that their interests are mutually conflicting. This is far from being true. There is a strong mutuality of interest between these parties. Industrial peace, higher production, rising productivity and widening employment opportunities offer the prospect of rising real wages and security. To the employer, they spell larger profits and opportunities for expansion. To the Government, such a situation would bring larger revenues, more rapid growth and political stability.

Indian labour lived in isolation from the rest of India, behaved as if they could have the best of the bargain and live in comfort and ease while large sections of people rotted in a state of abject poverty. There was an apathy to the needs of the poor, an indifference to national welfare, an attitude of callous neglect of their duty to society. There was only one consideration that led them along their capacity to exploit their organised strength to wrest more money for themselves. It was inevitable that under such a flagrant violation of the basic law of good industrial progress that stresses high productivity and low cost, the nation's programme became tardy, faltering, and unbalanced.

The term 'labour' began to cover the entire working class. It brought within its sweep people earning several times the average income of an Indian (This was around Rs 30 per month in 1975-76). It could be applied to a peon in a nationalised bank, earning anything from Rs 400 to Rs 900 per month, to a pilot whose pay packet ranged from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 per month. Once the term labour covered them, those privileged sections mustered all the power lent by trade unionism, the evils of which had been brought out clearly through the economic stagnation and resultant inflation that have cut into the nation's progress, and often struck work to gain more material benefits.

One of the major issues which have caused strikes is the quantum of bonus. Bonus began as an incentive to labour to put in better efforts to augment production. It was conceived as the just share that should go to those, who, by their labour and hard work, brought out increased productivity and thus fetched the concern larger profits. It became an extra payment, made to the

worker for his role in increased prosperity of the concern.

In India, however, it acquired a new connotation, and the term was 'deferred wages'. The origin of this interpretation has been traced by Arvind Bhandari :

The stipulation that a company should pay a statutory minimum bonus even if it is making a loss is economically illogical. It is absurd that a losing concern should be asked to make an extra payment which is actually supposed to be participation in prosperity. According to the prestigious *Random House Dictionary*, bonus is 'something given or paid over and above what is due.' Prostitution of the notion of 'bonus' has occurred primarily because of the tendency of the previous Congress Governments ever since independence to *ad hocism* in the face of rising clamour of the labour for better economic justice. whenever the workers' demand for higher wages rose to a fortissimo, the Government responded to the situation by asking employers to pay bonus, which thus became deferred wages. The rationale behind the talk about a statutory minimum bonus is that the notion has come to be regarded as deferred wages.....It is nonsense to evolve any bonus policy on the basis of a statutory minimum, whatever this minimum may be, for in that case bonus becomes nothing but a postponement of wages. Not only is it wrong in principle, several losing concerns may actually collapse under the burden.

This does not mean that labour should not claim their rightful share in the economy. They should enjoy the right to protect their real wages. This can be achieved only by sustained hard work on their part, by a proper economic climate where the benefits of increased production reaches not only those who are directly responsible for the economic boom, but also those sections of the working class whose only hope lies in the sense of fair play displayed by the economically viable groups of people.

The new style of exploitation, so dexterously evolved by business houses and the labour to pocket larger and still larger shares of the limited resources of the nation, found new addicts in the ranks of wholesalers, retailers and petty traders. They all joined

the loot with great glee. The golden era had dawned for them. The time to make quick money was there. They were not unwilling to liberate themselves from age-old traditions and norms. Those who refused to move with the times were swept away by the tide. The field of trade became the heaven for the unscrupulous, the unprincipled. There was no room here for those who conformed to values of the past and held integrity as the essence of good business. Trade slipped rapidly into the hands of those who jumped on to the snowballing bandwagon of grabbers and plunderers.

Once President Ford had a jibe at politicians. He noted that they generally had their hands in the pockets of others and expressed a wish that he would live to see politicians putting their hands into their own pockets. It is not clear whether the story is apocryphal, but it depicts, in a small way, the wish that the Indian masses have been expressing for long. Their pockets had become the dipping ground for the hands of every scheming, plotting link in the trade.

The public were thrown at the mercy of these powerful elements who pull the strings of economic power. The wholesalers, the traders and the petty shopkeepers who form the long chain through which goods trickle down to the public from the centres of production, manipulated prices and supplies to bag bigger profits. The tricks they adopted to attain their ends ranged from subtle twisting of the loopholes in the law to open violation of the rules and regulations. Mostly, they got away with it because they were ready to grease the palms of those who were expected to keep a watch over their dealings. The business community did not hesitate to buy protection by paying the law a regular share of the big booty that reached them.

The lust for filthy lucre obscured everything else. The traders managed the supply and distribution of commodities to control the prices, to make it swing in the direction in which they wanted it to move. Artificial scarcities of goods of daily use, brought about by large-scale hoardings, gave a new dimension to the whole edifice of trade. The difference between trade and loot became almost indistinct.

Even the limited effort made by the Government to

channelise the distribution of essential commodities through fair price shops, did not make much of an impact on the traders' manipulative tactics. The trading community found that the fair-price shops offered yet another outlet for them to earn sizeable profits. Working hand in glove with corrupt officials, owners of fair price shops siphoned out controlled items, explained their distribution by accounting for them against bogus ration cards, sold out the goods in the black market, and accumulated sizeable black money.

Black money, by definition, is money that is not accounted for. It is money whose source cannot be explained and hence evades the tax net. It cannot find its way into banks or commercial institutions in an open way. Hence, it operates surreptitiously, slyly, eroding the value of the currency, diluting the purchasing power of money, creating a parallel economy which debilitates and weakens the fibre of society.

The trading community found black money swelling its coffers. Black money lined the pockets of the guardians of the law, entrusted to enforce the correct code of conduct on the trading community.

The cult of black money found new adherents when tax rates showed sudden spurts. These adherents, mostly from professional classes, could conceal their incomes with ease. Their incomes varied from month to month, depended on the clientele that sought their services. A few consultations or services, kept out of the account books, reduced substantially the incidence of taxes. But the money so earned could not be deposited in the banks. Hence, this money could not be ploughed back into normal channels of investment.

The clandestine moves of the trading community and the professional classes were known to those entrusted with the task of keeping track of tax evaders. Their patronage made it possible for black money to grow. The Government tried, rather half-heartedly, to get hold of the black money. Voluntary disclosure schemes, with incentives thrown in, brought out some. But every move of the Government achieved only minimal success. Black money circulated, projecting a parallel economy, playing havoc with planning, disturbing the price of most commodities, adding to the misery of the have-nots, providing hoarders of this tainted

wealth the wherewithal for luxurious and often ostentatious spending.

The flow of black money could have been arrested, largely, but for the tacit approval of its growth by the political forces. It was black money which provided the parties with funds to fight elections, to spend much more than the amount stipulated by the Election Commission. The contributions to Party funds, made in the form of black money, were beyond the pale of organised accounting. It was inevitable that large chunks of these contributions were drawn out for personal enrichment by the vital links in the collection of Party funds. Such selfish moves of Party bosses worried the Central leaders. But the latter preferred to close their eyes to such moves as the whole operation of fund collection, based on black money, was unethical and cut against all the essential rules of nationalism.

The estimate of black money, now circulating in the country, varies widely. One estimate fixes the quantum at Rs 4,000 crores. Another estimate puts it at Rs 10,000 crores. None knows the exact figure. But black money is very much there, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, throwing all our planning processes into disarray.

Those with black money also found the solution to convert the black money, if not the entire lot, at least a part of it, into white money. A whole new range of monetary operation came into existence that had the technical skill to give a shade of white to truly black money. The sophistication that marked these deals carried the stamp of leading tax practitioners and legal luminaries. With delectable delight, they exploited all the flaws in the law to bring about the change. Since farm income is not taxable, black money covertly got converted into white money in the shape of supposed income earned from farming which, in most cases, was never undertaken. Lotteries came in as a ready aid. Successful lottery and jackpot tickets were bought from the winners by offering them two or three times the prize amounts, thus passing off the black money to small holders who could get away with it without rousing any suspicion while the holders of the black money, usually the big fish, got hold of prize money that could be pumped into business through legally approved channels.

Tax evasion became a way of life. It became a highly profitable business which enjoyed the patronage of the bigwigs. A report in the national press read :

The evaders are usually highly influential people with top-level connexions in and outside the Income-Tax Department. All too often, evasion cases were hushed up at the departmental level, and if any case escapes that, political pressure is sought and all too often exerted. In a speech (in 1971) in Madras, the Chairman of the Board of Direct Taxes said that out of 100 cases of tax evasion or concealment about which the Board had positive information, only five were taken up for action—because the Board wanted to proceed in only those cases where it was cent per cent certain. What he failed to add was that 95% of the cases were hushed up through either gratification not strictly legal or because of political pressure. A few years ago the Central Board of Revenues sought to prosecute a few corrupt businessmen and, assisted by the U.S. Internal Revenue Department, it even prepared charge-sheets. At this stage, some Central political leaders, allegedly including a Central Minister, intervened and the case was promptly dropped.

Indian economy, reeling under the impact of this unaccounted hidden wealth, became exposed to another danger from outside the country. There was no proper appreciation of the insidious manner in which the Indian rupee was devalued through the operations of smugglers and exporters. The racket was supported by Indian residents abroad who realised that the amount they remitted to India, through proper channels, fetched them much less than what they could get if the amount was sent through foreign exchange operators with their contacts in India. The agents of smugglers in India collected money in foreign currency, sent directions, through secret channels of communications, of amount to be paid to the payees in India. The amount, so collected in foreign currency, was used to buy up things like cosmetics, saris, watches, tape-recorders and other luxury items which were smuggled into India and sold at high profits. The Enforcement Directorate often caught the small fish. The really big giants who controlled the

operations remained outside the pale of the law, continued their operations with the connivance and protection of officials and political bosses.

For nearly three decades, the country has survived despite such organised loot by the very group of people who claim to be trustees of public welfare. During this period, vague promises, empty pledges, half-hearted measures, flamboyant display of official power, and a few stray attempts to counter the moves of the looters kept up the image of the regime. The public were told, again and again, that the Government would not sit and watch helplessly while such naked plunder of the limited resources of the country continued.

These statements and actions were meant to defuse public criticism. They were aimed at subduing the strident and raucous notes of condemnation. They were not matched by sincere or concerted action. Everyone took the people for granted. The loot continued unabated. The slimy operations brought more money into the hands of the moneyed class, left the poor poorer.

Was the emergency, the reign of absolutism, the result of the gradual erosion of the purchasing power of the masses and the resultant erosion of the trust of the masses in the capacity of democracy to deliver the goods ?

To what extent did economic factors influence the imposition of authoritarian rule, give it, if not anything else, at least the propaganda machinery to justify the deviation from democracy ?

This brings to the forefront the question, 'How much of the guilt should be borne by the people who were participants in the organised loot ?'

The politician, to whatever shade of political opinion he belongs, stands exposed. For he, during the last thirty years of independence, lived in pomp and show, exploited the power vested in him to earn sizeable fortunes for himself, gave the impetus to corruption, gave it tacit blessing by becoming an active participant in corrupt deals.

The civil servants took the cue from the political bosses. They kept up the format of rules and regulations, yet found enough manoeuvering space to placate the moneyed-class and to earn benefits for themselves. They enjoyed the power they wielded, and were

ready, by and large, to exploit that power in favour of the persons who could buy them. Loyalty to the Government, which, in the ultimate end, signifies loyalty to the people, got relegated to the sidelines. Nothing twitted them ; nothing touched their conscience. They played the game with subtle ability, performed tight-rope walk, fattened their purses, and sought unashamedly all the good things of life. Thus, they wounded the economy of the nation, and by being actively and profitably involved the mass plunders, are unequivocally guilty of the crime of devaluing democracy in India.

The industrialists, already rich, not in urgent need of augmenting their wealth, still craved for more and more money. They used their money power to buy everyone—from the politician to the civil servant—played the role of Judas to the nation, and lent definition to the organised loot. The traders and the shop-keepers too joined the fray.

The working class too had a major role in hurting the economy of the nation. It was strange that the very people who were closest to the poorest sections of the people failed to protect the interests of the poverty-ridden masses. Their swerve from the right path of sharing the economic boom with the large mass of Indians to the course of cornering benefits for themselves damaged the economy, made the gap between the haves and the have-nots more difficult to bridge.

The smugglers and the black marketeers hacked and sawed at the limited resources, looking around for monetary benefits through tricks that severely crippled the nation's economy.

Their collective crime proved too much for the nation. The poor had no hope of redemption so long as the potentates, who like spider controlled the vast web of money power, operated without any consideration of social justice. The simmering discontent among the poor villagers and agricultural labour, caused by the economic crimes of the rich, gave the justification for the imposition of authoritarian rule.

The monumental guilt of the diverse elements who ruined the economy by rabid plunder stands out in all its grotesque form. There is no justification that the guilty can offer, no expiation that will wash off their sins.

## Bleeding Heart

India lives in the villages where its teeming millions wait patiently for the benefits of freedom to trickle down to them.

Thirty years have slipped by into the pages of history. But there has been no tangible change in the conditions of the villages. Practically all the villages are shrouded in abject poverty. Now there is the distant thunder of discontent. The lava and steam of neglect and frustration is seething within like a slumbering volcano, stirring back to life, ready to erupt suddenly, without warning.

Efforts made to defuse the simmering discontent have been half-hearted, ineffective. The villagers are still waiting. Their wait seems to be interminable. There is not even the flicker of a feeble light at the end of the tunnel.

Of course, India lives in its villages. It is here that we can feel the pulse of the nation, measure the heartbeats and assess the state of health of the vast country. But the beats are irregular and faltering. Years of neglect, aggravated by efforts of interested parties to alter it and to dehumanise it, have sapped its vitality. The injuries caused by naked disregard of basic rules of good society have lacerated it. India's heart is indeed bleeding.

Debilitated by the years of waiting filled with the agony of unfulfilled dreams the heart of the nation became almost mordant. The surgeon could do as she pleased. She, ever an opportunist, took resort to shock tactics.

The majority of villagers, living in awesome poverty, denied even the minimum requirements of life, readily accepted the explanation offered by the leaders of the ruling Party for the imposition of Emergency in 1975.

They were told that the subtle-nuances of democracy stood in

the way of quick healing. The blame for tardy land reforms and faltering welfare works was put on the so-called non-cooperative attitude of the Opposition. There was only one route available for the nation to pull out of the mess. It was necessary to break away from democratic norms, if not completely, at least to some extent, and to give the ruling clique further powers that smacked unmistakably of dictatorship. Only thus could the vast majority of the masses be pulled out of their abysmal poverty.

These statements and reasonings were further bolstered with sugary words and baited promises. These promises were built around immediate implementation of land ceiling, abolition of bonded labour and elimination of money lenders who charged exorbitant rates on interest and kept the villagers in a state of indebtedness forever.

These promises camouflaged successfully the real purpose of the Emergency.

The scope for providing such an attractive cover for the draconian measures envisaged, was provided by the failure of successive Congress regimes at the Centre, (including that of Mrs Gandhi from 1966 to 1975) and in the States for the major part of the period up to the imposition of national Emergency to redeem the Party's pledges to the masses.

The villagers had been hopeful of a new attitude on the part of the regime. They were fed on vapid promises, empty pledges and vague exhortations. These promises cascaded during the days immediately preceding the elections. Then, they became debating grounds at the apex forums of planning. The debates continued, acrimoniously, spiritedly. New ideological theories were propounded by economic pundits, sitting in cosy comfort in air-conditioned cubicles of their offices in Delhi. The theories looked immaculately perfect on paper. But there was a common denominator which rendered all of them null and void unreality. These plans were drawn up by men who, by and large, had lost touch with the villages and therefore did not have the basic understanding of the society for whose uplift they were drafting grand plans. Naturally, they had the trappings of unreality, impracticability, nay even a touch of castle building. Even in those cases where the schemes had some chance of success if implemented with dedication and sincerity, the

political leadership and the administrative machinery dragged their feet.

The villagers were made to live in a make-believe world built around vague theories and improvised plans. "People have had a very limited share in the preparation and execution of the plans ; and the awareness of their bearings upon their well-being is almost completely lacking and much more so of the all-pervading social purpose without which an individual project and all projects taken together cannot acquire essential unity and coherence."

The lack of consistency and coherence in the moves to ameliorate the living conditions in the villages made a mockery of all the grand plans that our leaders evolved.

The Congress Party, organised by elite sections of the populace, still unsure of the distance the Party had to travel before freedom could be achieved, spelt out its objectives for radical land reforms. These objectives were largely the result of the collective thinking of the socialists in the Party. Pandit Nehru, though not aware of the plight of the villagers, aligned himself with the masses and asserted that he fully subscribed to the view of 'land for the tiller.' This implied the abolition of all large holdings of land and the transfer of the ownership of the land to cultivating tenants. It also indicated a break from the past.

It was in the light of the known ideals of the Party that the Congress Ministries, which came to power in the provinces in 1937, took some measures to bring relief to the ryots. Debt relief was one of the moves. But any radical reform was beyond the purview of the regimes.

The Congress still did not realise the magnitude of the problem. There was a vague hope that the concept of trusteeship, so cogently presented by the Mahatma, would bring about a change in the rural scene voluntarily. Gandhiji had repeatedly exhorted industrialists and big land owners to look upon their possessions as trusts. He had pressed on them the idea of sharing with the people the benefits which accrued by the hard labour of various sections of people. The idea was something that went beyond the limits of legality, and was essentially rooted in the domain of higher morality.

The appeal of the Mahatma did no go beyond the circle of his close associates. Even on them, the impact was marginal. For,

it is not in the nature of men to voluntarily surrender their possessions or to sacrifice their economic security in the interests of others.

It was evident, when India became free, that land reforms were needed urgently. It was also agreed that only through proper legislation could required changes be brought about.

The first major step in this direction was taken with the abolition of Zamindari. The move was hailed by the Congress leaders as the harbinger of more radical changes. It was publicised as the precursor of further reforms that would remove the wide disparity in the rural scene. It whipped up much enthusiasm among the peasants.

The abolition of Zamindari was a step in the right direction. However, it lost much of its intrinsic worth due to the substitution of Zamindari with a bunch of officials at whose mercy the villagers were placed. S.K. Dey, who for a long time planned and executed the Community Development schemes in the country, noted :

The Congress Party, at the peak of its fight against alien rule, made emphatic declarations in favour of land reforms the moment India became free from the shackles of colonial rule. India did become free. The promise had to be realised. U.P., the biggest State in India, went ahead with the abolition of Zamindari and introduced far-reaching system of reforms in tenancy.

However, even in U.P., where Zamindars have been abolished, Zamindari has not been ; for in place of the Zamindar from whom the tenant used to get short term loans and other assistance, he has now to seek favours of a large galaxy of government servants, none of whom individually is capable of meeting his demands, all of whom fail to act in unison and between whom the farmer has to expand a good part of the resources he receives from them as agricultural assistance. Other States in India also followed land reforms as a policy, but somehow the substance of land reforms has not been achieved, for the pillars from which the Party in power derives its strength are landlords in the countryside and the moneyed people in the cities and towns. The very big

landlords, owning holdings of a thousand and more acres, of course, were abolished, for they belonged more or less to the class of princes. But landlords at the middle level could hardly be touched, for they form the backbone of the political organisation that rules the country.

Political interests outweighed the needs of society. There was a general reluctance to make any move that hit the interests of middle-level landlords. This was so because the political leaders who had drifted into the Party, after freedom, were themselves from this class and still retained fairly large land holdings. They realised that they could not give up the pretext of being ardent supporters of land reforms. They mouthed catchy slogans in public, but were clear in their minds that they would dilute and water down the reforms, either through provisions of necessary loopholes in the legislations or through sleek and inert implementation of the reforms. They indulged in doubletalk. They created much stir, raised much din and noise, but these exercises were tantamount to just so much hot air.

If pious resolutions could have brought in the requisite reforms, our legislature and planners could not have been pilloried today. In every plan, more and more verbiage was heaped in, reiterating the determination of the Government to remove the age-old fetters upon rural society. The statements were consistent with the Directive Principle embodied in Article 39 of our Constitution which lays down that the ownership and control of material resources of the community are to be so distributed as best to serve the common good and prevent concentration of wealth and means of production in a few hands to the detriment of the community.

The general concept, embodied in the Constitutional directive, was given shape and format in our plans. B.M. Bhatia has commented :

The first plan recognised that the pattern of land ownership and cultivation was a fundamental issue in national development and set out a broad outline of the policy to be followed by the State governments. The policy was further elaborated in the second plan and the objectives aimed at were (1) to

remove the impediments in the way of agricultural production as arose from the character of the agrarian structure and to create conditions for evolving as speedily as possible an agrarian economy with high levels of efficiency and productivity ; and (2) to establish an egalitarian society and eliminate social inequalities. To achieve this objective, the policy measures recommended were : (a) abolition of intermediary tenures ; (b) tenancy reforms including regulation of rents, security of tenure, and enabling the tenant to get ownership, of his holdings ; (c) ceilings on land holdings ; (d) consolidation of holdings ; and (e) agrarian reorganisation.

The third plan laid emphasis on more vigorous implementation of the policy, laid down in the second plan and embodied in legislation on various aspects of land reforms undertaken by states in pursuance of accepted policies. The fourth plan called for a reorientation of land policy, having regard to the technological developments in agriculture and social requirements of the time and for review of the provisions in the existing legislation and measures for their expeditious implementation.

The very fact that every successive plan repeated the same ideals in more potent and vigorous manner indicates that precious little breakthrough was achieved in bringing in the much needed agrarian reform. The reason, as already detailed, is not far to seek. Vested interests, entrenched in the political hierarchy and the administrative machinery, operated on the sly to stall any real change.

The stream of directives and guidelines that emanated from Delhi and flowed out to the State capitals kept up the semblance of hectic activity. It looked as if the regime was intent on quickly giving shape to the resolutions through positive actions.

But the flow of paper in either direction did not indicate a genuine will on the part of the Party in power to bring about a quick transformation of the rural scene. Every suggestion or proposal or general guidelines that came from the highest authority was fed into the complex machinery at each State capital. The proposal was analysed, studied by expert groups, reframed by legal pundits,

drafted in cogent language by the minions in the Secretariat before being brought before the legislature for processing. This was done with excruciating slowness. There was no sense of urgency attached to land reform. What was needed was some measure or other on the anvil to lull the doubt of the masses.

While every proposed legislation moved through the tortuous governmental processing, the landlords who had access to the decision-making bodies knew the contemplated moves. They had thus adequate time to take necessary action to beat the proposed reform when it became law.

The landlords, with access to the corridors of power, and tremendous influence on the political leadership and the administrative machinery, and who, in many cases, played both roles with consummate skill, cleverly manipulated the revenue records. They executed documents, dividing their lands among relatives and friends, totally nullifying in effect whatever ceilings the government had in view.

The *Indian Express*, in its editorial of 7 January 1978, commented :

The official estimate of surplus land which could become available for distribution among the landless, when the ceiling idea was first conceived, late in the fifties, stood as high as 6.3 million acres. There has been a progressive decline in this figure even though the ceiling has been revised downwards from time to time. It had come down to only 40 lakhs acres four years ago when the previous government embarked on a land reforms campaign under a fresh set of national guidelines for the purpose. The upshot has been further disappearance of the available surplus from land records with the land actually distributed coming to less than five lakh acres.

It must now be recognised that the land ceiling law is essentially misconceived. Apart from exemption and other clauses, the ceiling under this law is subject to reservation of land for 'personal cultivation' by the landlord as the first charge; the available surplus as residuary. This gives full scope for the land owners to evict tenants and reduce them to agricultural labourers in the name of 'personal cultivation' and

avoid giving up land for redistribution as far as possible. Land reforms through imposition of land ceiling has thus turned out to be a mirage.

Ceiling on land had that fascinating quality of a boomerang which comes back and leaves the inept thrower with a bloody nose.

The same fate was in store for Bhoojan, a movement which, in its initial stages, was hailed as the positive example of Gandhian ideology. It was trumpeted around as a unique experiment, carried out on Gandhian lines. The supporters of Bhoojan indicated that there was a genuine change of heart among the landlords, that they were willing to surrender excess land voluntarily for redistribution among the landless.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave, who began this movement on 18 April 1951, in Andhra, asserted that it implied a total change in the concept of private property in land. He denied that the land that he secured was dole from the rich. He stated "In a just and equitable order of society, land must belong to all. That is why we do not beg for gifts, but demand a share to which the poor are rightly entitled. The main objective is to propagate the right thought by which social and economic maladjustments can be corrected without serious conflicts."

In the initial stages, the experiment created a big stir. It received even world-wide attention. The *Washington Post* acclaimed it 'as an outstanding example of current spiritual movements that differentiate the free world from totalitarian societies.' The *Economist* wrote : 'Bhoojan is a striking example of the advantage of private enterprise. Mr Bhave, single-handed, has done more than all the State Governments to get land for the landless.' The *Times Herald* commented : 'If Bhoojan can materially increase the tempo of India's land reform, it will have a great importance for the entire democratic world. For India's results in bringing about economic improvement by democratic means are measured by all Asia against those of China where totalitarian tactics are being used'.

Such high hopes, evoked by the Bhoojan Movement, cheered the hearts of the landless peasants. They nurtured the hope that they were about to be redeemed from the clutches of poverty. They hailed Acharya Bhave as a true liberator.

They did not know that there was little room for them to build such hopes. For, the grand experiment too was just a chimera

Most of the land donated 'willingly' by the landlords, turned out to be arid land, or uncultivable patches that could be brought under the plough only after heavy investment for which the poor landless labourer is not financially equipped, or land that simply did not exist.

Yet, much propaganda was made of the movement. It was the subterfuge through which vested interests stalled the demands of the masses, the trick to hoodwink the peasants.

S.K. Dey's comment on this splendid experiment brings out the true character of the Movement and the people who supported it :

When Bhoojan started all over the country, through the work of the Sarva Seva Sangh, wide publicity was given to the idea. It suited the Chief Ministers, the Ministers and everyone in politics to hail the Acharya as the new Messiah, using India's own method of working a silent revolution on land. No wonder that the Chief Minister down, everybody went all out to meet Acharya as soon as he made an entry into a particular State. But, tragically, the Acharya did not suspect what lay behind this princely reception accorded to him by people in power, who were otherwise helpless or unwilling to enforce land reforms against their own supporters and therefore were looking up to the Acharya as a safety valve for the people's wrath.

When more than half of Bhoojan land turned out to be either non-existent or utter waste-land, unfit for cultivation, the Acharya's followers struck the new note of Gramdan..... Gramdan had to fail..... The Acharya (did not) realise that Gramdan, Bhoojan and partial Gramdan were bound to flop without the willingness on his part or on the part of his followers to offer Satyagraha in favour of land reforms and that he was acting as a buffer between the forces of revolution and the vested interests in the country and was in practice merely stalling the revolution that was inevitable.

The political leadership thus failed the landless peasants and the small farmers. There was no real attempt even to bring in rational reforms that would bring tangible relief to the tenants. Even today, tenants enjoy little security of tenure. They are subject to the whims and fancies of the landlords. The reforms contemplated by successive plans have not yet been implemented. It has been widely accepted that the rent payable by the tenant should not exceed 20% to 25% of the gross produce, that all tenancies should be declared non-resumable and permanent and that gradual efforts should be made to confer ownership rights on the tenants. But in the absence of measures to give them concrete shape the ideals have become non-starters.

These failures nibbled at the faith of the landless peasants in the political leadership. When they placed at the mercy of petty village officials who were expected to serve them, but who acted as overlords, when the landed gentry worked hand in glove with the village officials to concoct and to create false records and data to stall the benefits which were promised to them, the concept of democracy lost its appeal.

The Naxalite Movement which rocked the country, five years back, was the display of the fury of the landless masses at the sluggish pace of land reform. To quote Jayaprakash Narayan :

It is not the so-called Naxalites who have sathered this violence, but they who have persistently defied and defeated the laws for the past so many years—be they politicians, administrators landowners, money-lenders. The big farmers who cheated the ceiling law through benami and fictitious settlements ; the gentlemen who grabbed government lands and village commons; the landowners who persistently denied the legal rights of their share-croppers and evicted them from their holdings and who underpaid their labourers and threw them out from their homesteads ; the men who by fraud or force took the lands away from the weaker section ; the so-called upper-caste men who looked down upon their Harijan brethren and illtreated and socially discriminated against them; the money-lenders who charged usurious interests and seized the lands of the poor and the weak; the politicians, the administrators and all others who aided and

abetted these wrongs—it is they who are responsible for the accumulated sense of injustice, grievance and hurt among the poor and the down-trodden that is now seeking its outlet in violence.

The rich landlords, with the immense political leverage they enjoyed, ignored the signs of the time. They cleverly manipulated the available options to further enrich themselves. Without any compunction, they cornered all the benefits for themselves, imposed their authority arrogantly on the economically weaker section of villagers. With their money power, they kept the small land holders and the landless peasants in a state of subjugation. Bonded labour continued, despite reiteration by the Government that the system should end. Lakhs of families indebted for generations to the big landlords, remained in a perpetual state of bondage. They were bound down by an attenuated form of slavery, exclusively. Indian in character, evolved out of the social milieu of our villages.

During the Emergency, it was claimed on behalf of the Government that bonded labour had been abolished. The media gave wide publicity to the news. The Press showered encomiums on the decision-makers. The political leaders, inflated with the praise showered on them, ran around the length and breadth of the country, participating in ornate functions where groups of bonded labourers were set free. Their mien and postures created the impression that they were modern Lincolns.

Yet there was something theatrical about the whole thing. It was too good to be true.

So it turned out to be. Recently, a press correspondent noted :

The following story illustrates the conditions in Ratlam district and perhaps elsewhere also. Told about the various implications of the Act abolishing bonded labour, a Hali (ploughman) stood up and said, 'Sahib, Dilli ke Sarkar ne is kanoon ko man liya, lekin hamare gaon ki Sarkar ne ise nahi mana-' (The Government at Delhi has accepted the law, but the Government in our village has not).

Bonded labour is still there, very much part of the village

scene, an ugly blotch on our conscience, anathema to the fair name of our democracy.

The big landlords moved with the tides, yet kept the poor and the indebted in a state of suspended animation. The progress that freedom promised did not filter down to the poor. Avaricious and wholly unscrupulous, the self seeking rich siphoned all the benefits of development, at source itself, not even allowing a tiny trickle to seep down to the poor.

The damage that such selfishness did to the fabric of the nation was not realised by the well-to-do class. They became so utterly engrossed in their material comforts and bank balances that everything else, even the nation, was pushed to the background.

The rich landlords rendered a great disservice to the nation by fanning their interests. They managed, under the canopy of gloriously empty words presented by the political leadership itself—that India is basically an agricultural country and that all efforts should be made to make India self-sufficient in food—to corner all the benefits for themselves.

One such benefit was exemption from taxation. In every society, it is ultimately the citizen's readiness to provide the wherewithal for the management of the State that decides the buoyancy of the economy. By seeking exemption from taxation, by wriggling out of their obligation to contribute to the nation's funds, the landlords denied the nation its due. Thus they weakened the nation's economy. They appropriated to themselves the benefits which came from massive investments on the agricultural sector, yet did not make any attempt to share the financial burden.

The lust for lucre which guided them hit the nation in many ways. It denied to the national exchequer funds urgently needed for development work. It widened the already ominous gap in the budget, led to deficit financing and accelerated the pace of inflation.

It provided an easy way for people with black money to convert their illicit wealth into legal currency. Many of them bought farmlands. On paper, they showed fabulous profits on lands, whereas in actual facts many of the farms were not brought under the till at all. Even in those cases where some cultivation was done, it was just nominal and did not bear any relation to the actual returns supposed to have been obtained from them. Thus they con-

verted their black money into white. Such massive conversion was made possible because of the exemption from taxation attached to income from agriculture.

The iniquity of the exemption becomes apparent when we read the comment of B. M. Bhatia :

Out of the total agricultural income of Rs. 14,905 crores in 1969-1970, Rs. 10,985 crores or 73% of the whole was earned by those with a holding of 10 acres or more. After meeting consumption expenditure, this section was left with a net disposable income of Rs. 7,589 crores. The taxable capacity of this section fares favourably with urban income tax payers. But whereas the latter paid Rs 917 crores by way of income and corporate taxes, in 1969-70, the former paid a miserable Rs 86.5 crores in land revenue and agricultural income tax.

These figures disprove the oft-repeated contention of the politicians that in the matter of taxation, agriculture is let off lightly in the country because of the poverty of the agriculturists. There is no doubt about the poverty of the poor farmer and his inability to bear the tax burden in proportion to the urban tax payer. But distribution of agricultural incomes in the country is highly skewed in favour of the rich. The top 25% of the farming households owning 10 acres and above account for 74% of the agricultural income in the country as against the remaining 26% of that income falling to the share of the other 75% of the agriculturists. There is no reason why the top 25% should be treated differentially as against non-agriculturist income-earners of comparable status.

No wonder, the rich agriculturist became richer while the poor peasant and landless labour sank further into the mire of poverty.

A feeble attempt was made to release the small holders from the clutches of village-lenders. Rural credit was first channelised through agricultural credit societies. But the management of these organisations fell into the hands of the moneyed class. The officials who controlled these institutions too came under the influence of the rich. The two joined together to siphon out funds from the co-operative banks through shady or clandestine deals. The funds thus released were utilised by the rich to extend loans to the poor at

exorbitant rates, to increase their hold on the landless labour, to keep them under bonded labour.

The nationalisation of 14 commercial banks in 1969, it was hoped, would change the situation. One of the defined objectives of bank nationalisation was the direct entry into the field of rural financing by these banks. There was a spurt in the activities of the banks. In June 1969 there were only 1,832 branches of the big banks functioning in rural areas. By December 1975, their number increased to 7,376. This was an impressive explosion in banking facilities.

The entry of big commercial banks, now nationalised and hence motivated not purely by ideas of profit, but also by the declared objective of releasing the poorer section of the rural populace from the clutches of money-lenders and rich farmers, brought about little change in the situation. The nationalised banks hit at the viability of the cooperative banks. The higher rate of interest offered by the banks brought in more deposits. In the beginning, loans were sanctioned rather liberally. But, loans were not returned in time and legal actions to collect them created problems. Then the nationalised banks began to be more choosy and careful. As a consequence, they mopped up the savings of the rich, gained more deposits for which lucrative returns were assured to the big landlords, shrank the quantum of advances due to more stringent observance of the rules and regulations, ate into the funds which were previously advanced to the poor and the needy by the landlord at high rates of interest, and created a flow of capital from the rural areas into the urban sectors and into big industries. Thus, the nationalised banks not only failed to bring relief to the small farmers and the landless labour, but added to their difficulties by tightening the available resources.

In the cooperative banks, the big landholders exploited their influence and money-power to gain a large chunk of the advantage. The commercial banks too tilted in favour of the landed gentry who had the means to satisfy the stipulations on credit-worthiness.

As the nationalised banks failed to deliver the goods, the government came up with a new idea. It decided to open 50 regional rural banks to augment the banking facility in the remote areas.

The starting of the new credit organisations without really

strengthening the basic ideology behind the scheme and without conducting a new awareness among the officials of the banks to tackle effectively the special situation in the villages is bound to go the same way as their predecessors.

That is the truth which is yet to dawn on those who are behind all these schemes. All attempts in this direction have so far flopped because the real nature of the problem of the rural population is not properly understood by the men who project such plans, so immaculately perfect on paper, yet completely unsuited to the climate and tempo that prevail in the villages.

Other moves to improve the lot of the villagers like Community Development and National Extension Service too were proved hasty and illconceived due to the lack of enthusiasm among the men entrusted with the official responsibility of implementing these plans. The officials became more of an avoidable burden on the villages. An army of officials, from the Block Development Officers downwards, moved around in jeeps, condescendingly talking to the villagers retaining their urban complex, looking on the available avenues to swell their own coffers. They slid into the clutches of the big landlords. The choice seeds and fertilises given for distribution ended in the hands of the rich farmers. New projects for community welfare felt the invisible influence of the moneyed class. Dr Mellor of Cornell University who studied the working of these organisations commented :

The prime *ex-post-facto* criticism of the Community Development Programme have been that (1) it did not place enough emphasis on increasing agricultural production; (2) it expanded too rapidly, at the expense of quality; (3) it was divorced from research and from the old agricultural extension programme; thereby losing contact with the technical competence that did exist ; and (4) its administrative structure was such that the government gave orders to be filtered out to farmers through a complex bureaucracy which received little influence or guidance from the farmers themselves.

The style of functioning of the Community Development plan and the National Extension Service was the model for the Panchayats too. The introduction of politics into the villages, in the hope

that democracy would manage to gain hold at the grass roots, gave a new dimension to the complex situation. The villagers became aware, not of the subtle ideological differences presented by the various parties, but of the scope the alignment with the political forces lent to their operations. The power that came to the hands of the leaders of the villages (they were again, the rich and the affluent farmers; the poor landlords and the unemployed labour were so engrossed in earning their living that they had no time to indulge in public works) brought the rewards of national progress to the rich. Money, it is said, begets money. No better example to sustain this thesis can be offered than the ease with which the rich landowners monopolised all the channels of development, gained access to the large funds pumped into the agrarian sector, and fattened themselves at the expense of the people for whose uplift these developmental plans had been made.

Panchayats became the seats of the corrupt and the rich. Many villages became plagued by political ideas as propagated by the influential leaders of the villages. The people formed groups and sub-groups. Skirmishes, illegal occupation of the land of poor farmers by the rich and the influential, minor scuffles and occasional murders formed the new style of operation of the Panchayats. There was nothing left in the Panchayats of what the Mahatma had conceived. There was no sign of self-sufficiency of the villages in the matter of food, shelter and clothing. Gandhiji had visualised the panchayats to provide the base for a true egalitarian society. His concept of the village panchayat as the tiniest cell whose health and viability would provide the nourishment for India's progress found itself lost in the new style evolved by the powerful sector in the villages.

The panchayats, by and large, served the interests of the rich, kept up the outward semblance of public service. Thus they became a burden on the poor, yet another millstone round their necks, a new weapon through which the landlords could keep them in fetters. The panchayats, at least most of them, slipped into the hands of defective leadership. The defective leadership not only brought about stagnation, but actually helped society to slip backwards.

The unfortunate retrogression is nowhere more evident than

in the mounting unemployment in the rural set-up. There is not enough land to be allotted to landless labour. There is not even enough land on which they can be employed and be given living wages. Due to the population explosion, the number of rural unemployed is galloping at a menacing pace.

Yet, there has been no integrated, rational policy to tackle this menace. There is still muddled thinking about the role of mechanised farming, a sort of *ad-hoc*-ism which has failed to stem the rot.

Indecision in tackling the problem has added to the growing unrest among the rural unemployed. They are slowly realising that all the big words bandied around are just like the horns of a bull, a point here and a point there, and nothing in between. Yet, they are caught on the horns of muddled thinking of those who are supposed to pull them out of the rut.

There is one school of thought, a powerful lobby in the decision-making forums, which firmly believes that big farms are the ultimate solution to India's food needs. Once this idea is accepted, the present concept of ceiling on land, distribution of excess land to landless labour and ironing out the economic disparity among the rural populace loses its validity. Then, the case for mechanised farming gets a big boost, due to obvious reasons. Machines perform the tasks much faster, do not organise themselves and clamour for increased wages, are readily available all over the year unlike agricultural labour which is either over-abundant or rather scarce according to seasonal pressures.

Set against this is the current thinking that rural unemployment can not be tackled unless machines are relegated to the background, unless more labour is engaged on the farms. The highest priority deserves to be given to employment generation. To bring this about, there is need for machines to be phased out. Seasonal variations in the availability of labour all the year round, it is argued, can be tackled by diversion of labour force from neighbouring areas. Only thus can minimal purchasing power be lent to the landless labour.

The poor are not concerned with such debates. They are hungry. Their poverty has been increasing over the years. It has been a

sad, but nonetheless observed, phenomenon that in India, as well as in many other under-developed nations, the average income increase has pushed the people at the bottom of the economic scale further into poverty. For the benefits have been mopped up by the rich and the middle levels, leaving a wider gap between them and the poor.

The statement may appear rather strange, specially when there have been claims by our leaders that the benefits of planning have been brought to the poorest section of the populace. How far do these claims stand up to reality ?

There are several tests by which the state of poverty of the masses can be assessed.

Firstly, are the poor consuming more cereal than before ? They can't be if one goes by what a statistician has brought out recently. He noted that while per capita net national product at 1960-61 prices increased from Rs. 252.90 in 1950-51 to Rs 343.20 in 1974-75, the per capita production of the agricultural population declined over the years, came down from Rs 197.80 to Rs. 191.10.

Naturally, the poverty in the rural areas increased manifold. For, apart from the decline in the per capita production, there were other forces nibbling at the real income of the poor ; the capacity of the big landlords, the avarice of village officials, the insistent demands of new political forces. Hounded by all these self-seeking elements, bereft of subsistence, the poor slipped further and further down the economic ladder, belying all the hopes of a quick economic rejuvenation. \*

Poverty increased, got reflected in their simple, everyday life. Consumption of two items, taken at random, would show the trend, for instance, the per capita consumption of pulses. In 1950-51, it was 2.14 ounces per day. It showed an upward trend, touching 2.43 ounces in 1960-61. By 1964-65 it fell to 2.17 ounces. Then, it began to plummet at a very rapid pace. The annual figures from 1964-65 to 1974-75 read at 2.17, 1.70, 1.40, 1.98, 1.67, 1.83, 1.81, 1.66, 1.46, 1.44, and 1.47. In a decade of so-called progress the consumption of a basic essential ingredient like pulses fell by about 35% Taking this figure in conjunction with the increasing purchasing power in the hands of the affluent section, it can be safely said that the real fall in the quantum of consump-

tion of pulses by the poor must be much more than the average of 35 per cent.

Similarly consumption of cloth, which was estimated at 16 metres per capita in the sixties, came down to 14 metres per capita in the seventies.

Other items too showed the same pattern, bringing out the increasing poverty among the masses. There has been virtually no progress in providing houses for the poor. Educational facilities remain thoroughly inadequate. Medical facilities are non-existent, if not sparse. Supply of drinking water to the villagers is a promise which is yet to be fully redeemed. Modern sanitation is something that the rural poor are not aware of.

That sums up the dismal picture rural India presents. It presents, poignantly, the weakness of the nation, the utter indifference of the strata of society who could have changed the face of India with honest and earnest efforts, tells us how free India plunged into the clutches of poverty over nearly three decades.

It was the gradual weakening of India that prepared the ground for dictatorial rule.

The blame for the enervation of the real India, the villages, rests squarely and solidly on the leading political luminaries and the intellectual giants who manned the apex body of planning. Cut off from the harsh reality of the villages, nurturing their own concepts that had no relation to the real state of the rural scene, the politicians and the planners worked out parameters and working plans that were Utopian in idea. They rambled, confidently asserting their hopes, trying to carry with them the masses, with the confidence that they exuded. The schemes had all the lofty cliches that appear glamorous on paper. They were vote-catchers too. The gullible villagers accepted the schemes, looked upon them as the panaceas to their ills.

That was the first grievous wound on the heart of India.

Many others, perched in the wings like ravenous vultures, began to mill around. These were the big landlords, the rich nitwits, the transplanted members of the bureaucracy. All these forces joined together to bleed the poor. They kept the poor in eternal bondage. They stood between the poor and their legitimate share in the nation's progress. Thus, they destroyed the lingering hopes of

the masses, made them lose their faith in the capacity of democracy to redeem them.

The erosion of human values that had guided the nation, immediately after independence, made it easy for dictatorship to project itself as the only alternative through which the masses could get real benefits. The people, indifferent to the system that ruled them, more concerned with the quality of the progress that marked their lives, did not demur when democracy was given short shift.

Democracy had failed to lead them out of poverty. They were now ready to try out the desperate remedy of authoritarian rule. Perhaps one strong self-willed person at the wheel could do much better, they thought, than the circus of planners, administrators and others who had led the country into the quicksand of poverty and ignorance. So they thought.

## EIGHT

# The Guilty

People generally get the Government they deserve.

This axiom can be stretched a little further to lead us to a broader concept of the truth. Every society projects its own traits and characteristics through its political leadership, the intellectual class, the industrial community, the trading tribe, the landed gentry and the working class.

When the truth of this political concept become obvious, we realise that after having driven home the guilt of politicians, intellectuals, big businessmen and petty traders, big landlords and industrial workers and arraigned them before the court of highest justice, public opinion, we have to perforce take a long, hard look at ourselves, we, the common weal, the very stuff of democracy. Today, history accuses every Indian of failing the nation, of debasing democracy, of weakening the fabric of the nation, of preparing the ground for authoritarianism to grow and of straying from the path that our founding fathers charted so painstakingly for the nation.

This is the bitter truth and swallow it we must.

The burden of our guilt lies heavy upon us. We cringe, unable to stand the harsh glare of naked truth.

There is no escape for us from the writing on the wall. Face it we must. There is no valid defence to counter the charges. No amount of verbal jugglery will cover up the fact that we, each one of us, failed the nation. No legal quibbling will wipe out the stigma that clings to us.

For the stigma is not something that was imposed on us from outside. It is something that grew from within us. It is now part of our very being. It is a cancerous growth, nourished by our own unhealthy metabolism. It can be eliminated only by surgery.

But, surgical cure can begin only if we know how and when and where we failed to be cautious, how we let the cancer grow on us, feeding itself, weakening our body politic.

Democracy, in India started off on a bright note. It was hoped that it would acquire a special tang, an individual style exclusively its own. Gandhism was expected to temper it and to mellow it and to make it suited for Indian conditions. By superimposing Gandhian ideals, Indian society hoped to give democracy the wherewithal to thrive in India.

Yet, it was Gandhiji's advice that was given the short shift. Gandhiji suggested that the Congress Party should dissolve itself. This was advice based on a logical analysis of democracy and its needs.

Democracy can thrive only on the basis of political parties with clear ideological bases. The Congress Party had on its rolls desperate elements which had enlisted because they saw in it the most effective instrument of national liberation. The prime cause that motivated them was the fight against imperialism. Patriotism submerged personal political ideals and ideologies.

But with the advent of freedom, there was urgent need for a political realignment on the basis of ideology. It was this understanding of the situation that swayed Gandhiji to express himself firmly in favour of the Congress Party pulling down the shutters. He did not want the goodwill earned by the Congress to act like a millstone on the nascent democracy and to choke the channels through which it could have gained sustenance.

If this suggestion of Gandhiji had been accepted, the monolithic hold of the Congress over the nation, without any threat to its authority, would not have been possible. By ignoring these words of wisdom from someone no less than the Father of the Nation, the national leaders inflicted unwittingly a big blow on India's infant democracy. It is pertinent to quote the words of A.S. Raman :

Freedom would have become a reality to the common man if the Indian National Congress, having achieved its objective, of wresting power from the British, had liquidated itself voluntarily and re-emerged as a wholly service-oriented organisation dedicated to the vital task of strengthening the roots of

democracy in the country by improving the quality of life at the grass roots level. This was Gandhiji's suggestion, but no one would listen to him after August 1947 : He firmly believed that the Congress was an anachronism in Independent India.

The accent was on fashioning out India's own style of democracy. Whether this had anything to do with democratic democracy or not became the concern of only theoreticians, sitting in ivory towers. Democracy had already been twisted and twisted by several world leaders. China, though following the Maoist line, declared itself to be the People's Democracy. Field Marshal Ayub Khan tried, ineffectively, to create a new style of democracy and called it Guided Democracy. Soekarno had evolved his own model of democracy that had, at its core, the idea of perpetuating his rule.

Thus, democracy is one of the most widely abused words. It is the ideal cloak under which dictatorial regimes have assumed power. Even Mrs Gandhi, in her most authoritarian days, swore by democracy, asserted that all her moves were aimed at saving Indian democracy, and nailed the criticism on her opponents with the words : "Democracy is nobody's monopoly. No patent has been taken by other countries nor is our democracy under any foreign licence."

The failure of the nation, in its early stages, to disband the Congress and to bring out the evolution of two or three political Parties, led by former nationalists, weakened democracy. The Congress enjoyed a tremendous advantage in the early stages. The Party fully exploited the charisma of Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru. The masses voted for the Congress, not because the candidate who offered himself for election was equipped for the job and had deep ideological convictions and the zest to serve the people. Congress leaders defiantly declared that even a lamp post, nominated by them, would be returned to the Assembly or the Lok Sabha.

The people did not demur, even though they were being taken for granted. This malaise remained, though in a less virulent form, in subsequent elections as there was no concerted move against the Congress at the national level, no determined bid by the leaders

in the Opposition to come together on a common platform to fight the Congress. At no stage of its existence did the Congress face a real challenge. Finally, when the challenge came in 1977, the Congress monolith came apart and fell in countless pieces.

The guilt of debasing democracy by failing to exploit the vote power sticks on to every Indian.

Indians, at least the vast majority, never fully understood the power that vested in them. They were led by images, slogans, shibboleths, propaganda and charisma. Past loyalties too blinded their common sense. Many voters did not have the capacity to decide who among the candidates fighting for elections had the genuine ideological background and the latent desire to serve the masses. Vague promises held out during elections carried little weight with them. These promises did not register in their minds. Thus, it became all the more easy for those who got elected to forget the promises given to the masses.

Public memory, it is said, is too short. And the memory of the Indian masses is much shorter than public memory elsewhere.

The Indians looked upon elections as grand *tamashas*. They enjoyed the VIP treatment accorded to them. They gathered to listen to the speeches of the leaders, to watch the antics of the candidates, to enjoy the entertainment which formed an inalienable part of election meetings, a welcome break from humdrum routine. It was a novel experience for them when the sanitation squads suddenly swung into action, when the much-expected water supply was resumed, when the bus service became regular, when all other temporary palliatives were offered.

Beyond this concept of pleasure or comfort that reached them, albeit temporarily, the masses had no idea of the significance of the elections, of their prime role in the franchise. They did not know that votes are precious, that their votes would decide the quality of the administration they would beget for a period of five years following the election. They were ignorant of their power. It never entered into their reckoning that they could influence the nature and content of their Government by a judicious exercise of their franchise.

During the first general elections, the euphoria of Independence tilted the balance in favour of the Congress. In subsequent elections, the charisma of Pandit Nehru and later of Lal Bahadur Shastri and Mrs Gandhi blinded the real strength and purpose of voting power vested in the masses. The people were led by images and past loyalties. Money-power played havoc with their judgement. The poor and the needy, with their numbers swelling, even sold their votes to the highest bidder.

In most cases, they marched to the polling booth or were given free lifts in one or other of the vehicles engaged by the candidates to cast their votes as they had been coached. Often, these directives were issued by the moneyed class who controlled the poorer section of the populace. More often, votes were cast in consideration for under the table deals. Nowhere was the merit of the candidates taken into account.

Thus, the people allowed the unfit and the unworthy to represent them in the legislative bodies. The best candidates, more often than not, failed to get into the decision-making forum. The quality of the men who entered the legislative forums reflected in the degeneration which inevitably followed.

There is another inbuilt bias in the attitude of the voters. Though they are living in a secular democracy, they have nothing to do with either secularism or with democracy.

Unable to break away from the fetters of conventions and traditions, the people clung on to a sectarian bias. They were led away from the right path by caste considerations, by communal prejudices, by linguistic passions, by parochial interests.

It was this attitude which finally stood in the way of Indian unity. It became risky for political parties to choose a candidate for a constituency, however capable he be, unless he belonged to the right caste and community. Rational thinking was thus sacrificed in the race against communal power.

Casteism became rampant. It nibbled at the very foundation of democracy. Secularism became a lofty concept, enshrined in our Constitution, violated, in effect, by every one, including our leaders.

The surrender by the leaders to the whims and fancies of the masses further emboldened the electorate. They ought to have been

educated, advised to eschew narrow considerations and to take a broader, national view. But there was no leader great enough to tell the masses to dispel these wrong notions from their minds.

It was easier for the leaders to jump on to the freewheeling bandwagon and play along with the masses than to guide them away from the dangerous path.

The people fell easy victims to the propaganda unleashed by the garrulent and loquacious leaders. They allowed themselves to be used as pawns by self-seeking politicians in their pursuit of power. In their quest for power, concerned only with the immediate present, the politicians ignored public interest. Retention and perpetuation of power was the sole driving force. To achieve this end, they did not mind whipping up public emotions, rousing the people's passions by appealing to all sorts of base instincts, swinging at the crest of the turbulent wave, and enjoying the popularity which they earned by such tactics. They were, for all practical purposes, confirmed rabble-rousers. There has, in history, rarely been such a sudden dip of political luminaries from the height reached by them by the path of service to the lowest level of personal pandering.

The people, if they had the basic equipment to see through the game played by politicians, would have refused to become pawns in the game. But they failed in their responsibility. To them, the appeals to narrow passions by local politicians held out a lure. With their eyes closed, they followed the leadership, remained dumb to the call of the nation.

It was this attitude which led to the erosion of the bonds of Indian unity. It began with the pressure for the linguistic reorganisation of India. The promise to divide India on the basis of languages had been mooted way back in the thirties by the National Congress. Nobody realised, at the time of the passage of this resolution, that it would become a major issue after independence. The promise, held out through the resolution, surged out, suddenly, in the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras Presidency and set the nation on the jungle path of linguistic reorganisation.

The people trailed behind the leaders who, with their oratory, could set even the Thames on fire, and did not realise what benefits would accrue to them by the parcelling of their country on such

cancerous ground as the difference in languages. The question they should have asked that, whether such a political redrawing of the map of India would draw them closer to the centres of power and thus help them in the goal of economic liberation, social integration and political participation ? The people followed blindly. The analogy that springs to mind is one of the lamplings who rush towards the precipice. Mesmerised by the music of words showered by the politicians, the people followed stone-blind, their frenzy often reaching a dangerous pitch and spending itself out in the form of inane destruction of public property. Miscreants fully exploited the situation to indulge in loot and arson.

With the death of Potti Sriramulu, after a fast unto death for the cause, the issue became very explosive. The Central Government which had resisted the move buckled down. The deluge began. The States Reorganisation Commission went into the whole gamut of the issue and recommended the new political structuring of India.

This was a blow to Indian nationalism. It cut against the concept of unity in diversity. It put people in water-tight compartments, spun out of linguistic chauvinism. This eroded the essential quality of Indian nationalism. The people, unwittingly, became participants in this drama, and thus became accomplices in this act of destruction.

Once the reorganisation of the country on the basis of language was completed, there were other issues which gave the handle for the local politicians to whip up passions. Immediately after the reorganisation of India on the basis of language, (bi-Lingual Bombay remained a strange thing in the new set-up and had to wage a battle in which much precious common lives were lost while the leaders collected all the accolades), the leaders discovered new causes for which they could muster public support. The issues often tended to be ridiculous. At times it was about the inclusion or exclusion of a village or a hamlet in one or other of the States. The leaders did not give even elementary consideration to the fact that wherever the disputed territory lay, it still remained part of India. The manner in which the leaders fought the issue created the impression that the linguistic States did not subscribe to the wider picture of national unity. The troubles which flared up over Belgaum, the

rumblings which rocked Punjab over Chandigarh after the State was bifurcated in two, and the tremors that ripped through the 'Vidarbha Andolan' revealed the extent to which divisive tendencies were exploited by leaders obsessed with their popularity and hence incapable of viewing the damage that they did to the nation. By clustering around them, by supporting them, by being with them in the destructive move, the people of India played truant, prised away precious bricks from the foundations, and, weakened the structure.

The people ceased to think of India, began to think in terms of narrow blocs. The spread of this way of thinking created new problems. The sharing of the waters of the rivers exacerbated feelings among States. Shrewd politicians exploited the available options to ride the crest of public acclaim. The people mutely followed the leaders. They ridiculed those leaders who tried to tell them that agitations on such issues were meaningless. Blinded by narrow passion, the people rose like tidal waves. There was neither reason nor logic in their public demonstrations. Held fast by the strings which the petty politicians controlled, the people danced like puppets. For it was from them to debate the issue in depth. They could not even try to understand how a new approach to one or other of the problems, forced out by agitation, would bring benefits to them. Such considerations remained alien to their unenlightened nature.

Other issues helped the local politicians to be at the centre of public adulation. The location of steel plants, the selection of a site for opening a new Defence factory, the construction of a port or matters like those which should have been decided on the basis of economic factors and financial viability became issues of mass agitation. Thus the public forced showdowns on the streets. The harnessing of the limited resources of the nation, which should have been done judiciously and carefully, was done to pamper those who had maximum agitational power. The people went into hysterical fits of delight when their demands were finally conceded. But they did not realise what damage they had caused to the interests of the nation by clamouring, like children for decisions, on matters of vital interest to the nation, based on narrow parochial ideas.

The people failed the nation when they began to give second place to nationalism. Once the masses accepted the double-loyalty imposed on them, and nurtured by them, there was an inevitable

ebbing of the nation's strength. The mass hysteria roused by Shiv Sena in Bombay or the vituperative campaign against Bengalis in Assam reveals how far the concept of nationalism has been diluted. The people, normally, quiet, friendly, hospitable and kind, threw themselves into destructive struggles to wean out the right of every Indian citizen to live, to own property and to practise his profession in any part of the country, and thus stained their hands with the crime of weakening India.

Corruption became a way of life with politicians and officials. The masses accepted it with stoic indifference. By taking such a casual attitude to the growing canker of corruption, the people encouraged it to acquire dangerous proportions. Those with the necessary financial strength utilised their money-power to win favours for themselves. Those who could not afford the luxury of spending money to get their legitimate jobs done resigned themselves to the situation. Small tips were granted, even for making officials do their normal duties. To procure a duplicate of a document, to get an electricity connection, to get a *nullah* disinfected, people paid tips. Officials accepted these tips, happily. They realised that they had only to delay action or hold back what it was their duty to do, to earn small additional incomes. None demurred. The people ranted against corruption, but readily parted with small amounts to get over the ubiquitous Red Tape, to avoid delay, to escape repeated visits to officials to get simple jobs done.

Soon, a bigger and more vicious social animal, called nepotism, leaped into the bureaucratic jungle. Once again, the people accepted it, even justified its presence by saying that every man should fully exploit his opportunities, that it is human nature to extend benefits to one's relatives and friends. Thus, they left the field open for unscrupulous politicians and officials to gain the benefits which rightly belonged to others. Mild ripples that disturbed the placidity around corruption or nepotism were caused by benefits and were eager to have a larger share than what they managed to secure. The people, by and large, kept out of the sordid deals. If they had assembled themselves, as militantly as they gathered to fight causes which enervated the nation, corruption and nepotism could have been contained. But there was no leader

willing to fire them with the enthusiasm to fight such a cause. So they became resigned partners in the rapid advance of corruption, nepotism and favouritism which crippled Indian democracy.

The docility of the masses, except when whipped up by the passionate pleas of political leaders who had some axe to grind, further weakened the nation. The people always impatient for results, expected the Government to perform miracles. They waited, interminably, for the regime to come up with measures to improve their lot. Even where they could have taken the initiative and carried out constructive work, they refused to make the first move. They wanted someone to lead them. There were leaders enough to push them into inane agitations. But there were very few who could channelise the energy of the masses in a constructive direction. These few harnessed the villagers to build roads, to dig wells, to erect bunds, to cut irrigation canals, to build houses.

But, such moves by the villagers were very rare.

The unemployed labour, so abundantly available in the villages, could have been fully exploited to change the face of the country. It would have required only minimal effort on the part of the leaders of the small village community to carry out much needed public utility works. They could thus have created not only job opportunities for the unemployed, but also changed the complexion of the villages and made them economically more viable.

The people were, however, in the grip of a strange inertia. They wanted everything to be done by the Government and by officialdom. The Government moved on in its own languid manner. It groaned and cracked under the multitude of pressures. It failed to touch even the fringes of many of the problems of the rural masses.

Self help could have brought richer rewards to the villagers. But this was precisely what was absent. The few villagers who had the means for education moved away permanently from the villages, opted to get absorbed into urban society with its modern facilities and conveniences. Even the few educated people who lived in the villages refused to take any initiative except in the field of politics. They could have organised adult education. A pioneering effort in this direction had already been made by Welthy Fisher. What

was needed on the part of the educated few among the villagers was the will to spare some time to educate the people in the three Rs. But, only a microscopically small number showed an inclination to undertake this task.

The villages lagged behind because of the refusal of the skilled personnel to move to the villages. Medical personnel preferred to serve in urban areas, resented posting to villages, pulled all political levers available to them to thwart such postings. Teachers, engineers, nurses, sanitation officials, power technologists, even experts in community development preferred to stay in urban towns, making occasional forays into the villages in jeeps, parading their might and power that brought no tangible benefits to the masses.

It was the indifference of the people to national developments which hit them hard. They should have seen how a grand hoax was being played on them when about 60 per cent of the small industries, meant to be set up in undeveloped areas, so as to ensure a balanced economic development of the nation, clustered round the four metropolitan cities. The price they paid for lack of vigilance was widening economic disparity. They could not find leaders to educate them of the need to press for a proper implementation of the schemes which would have brought them richer economic rewards. Nor could they, on their own, bring pressure on the men in charge of implementation not to resort to legal quibblings to divert all resources to pockets of affluence.

The growing economic rural-urban divide could have been arrested if the people had sensed the trend and pitted themselves against it. But they had no mind of their own. They allowed ideas, nurtured by self-seeking politicians, to sway them. These ideas could rarely be identified with their interests.

The people were told to eschew communal feelings, to foster the spirit of nationalism. Yet, the conduct of the leaders who mouthed rousing speeches was hardly exemplary. Harijans remained the untouched core. The greatest hurt to the interests of the Harijans was done by the members of their own group. The blot still remains, despite years of proclaimed determination to wipe it out. The string of legislative measures, starting with Article 17 of the Constitution which states that untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden, have remained enshrined on

paper and have not been given tangible shape. There has been no change in the attitude of the caste Hindus who sneer at the Harijans and keep them at a distance. This is a sphere in which the change has to be wrought by the people themselves. Statutes, legislations, regulations and laws cannot do anything to bring the 90 million Harijans out of their backwardness unless there is a real change of heart among the caste Hindus. But they still remain bound down by the prejudices and predilections of the past. They have refused to understand the danger inherent in keeping a large section of the populace in eternal bondage. By refusing to give a truly democratic expression of their intention to absorb the Harijans into the mainstream of life, the people failed the nation.

To put the blame entirely on the caste Hindus would not be justified.

To some extent, the blame must rest on the Harijans who have found it difficult to shake themselves free of the force of habit strengthened by years of deprivation. They remain diffident, meek, even willing to put up with indignities. They still are caught between their beliefs in the traditions of the past and the natural aspirations roused by the modern ideas. They quibble and squirm, unable to assert their right to have a say in the conduct of the nation's affairs.

Even the more militant among them are content with special privileges, job reservations, concessions in educational institutions. They seem to be eager to perpetuate their backwardness so as to exploit the benefits of backwardness. That is why their backwardness shows no signs of abating. And it is likely to continue unless they pull themselves up to be on par with the rest of the nation in the fields of education and economy.

It is tragic that the Harijans who benefited most from the extra facilities extended to the community, who managed to lift themselves above their backwardness and got good jobs or started industrial units or found entrance into academic councils, have shown no interest in the condition of their brethren. They revealed a strange apathy to the cause of Harijans, looked around for ready acceptance from the caste Hindus, tried to keep their Harijan origin, as far as possible, a secret. By such an attitude, the Harijans who became well-equipped to lead the community played Judas to their

less lucky brethren.

Even the greatest leader of the community, Mr Jagjivan Ram, did not render the service that his community expected from him. It has been reported that his land, in his native village of Chandwa, has been leased out not to Harijans, but to caste Hindus. A recent report in SUNDAY commented : "At some point along the line, many of the exploited became the exploiters themselves...Jagjivan Babu is undoubtedly a great Harijan leader, but if you stroll around his village and pick up the stray remarks and comments of Harijans themselves, it would appear that Babuji is one Harijan leader who has really risen above the Harijan level."

The plight of the Harijans, therefore, is due as much to their inherent reluctance to break away from the cramps of the past as the failure of the elite of the community to stand by their clan after achieving material success. No amount of official moves will really extricate the Harijans from the clutches of poverty and illiteracy unless they exploit the facilities extended to them and pursue a path of progress which would make them, over the years, equal in all respects to the other better off citizens, and make protective measures like reservations redundant. But, such initiative from the Harijans remains a hope that has, as yet, shown no signs of realisation.

It is the same sad story that is told by the progress of the tribals. Governmental efforts in the direction of drawing the tribals, with their peculiar traditions and insular attitudes, into the national stream, have not succeeded except in a minor way. The intrusion of governmental agencies have, in some cases, even operated against the interests of the tribals. It is not the Government that failed in these cases, but the men through whom the projects were executed. It was again a case of the grasping Indian, satiating his desires at the cost on national interest.

India did not change much after independence. It still remained a male-oriented society. A few ladies from the richer class and the educated middle class entered various fields of activity. They pleaded for more educational facilities. They demanded more job opportunities. They often met and discussed the trend that is currently rocking the western nations. They conferred and debated, with all the passions and emotions, the

question of women's Liberation.

Their moves did not go beyond scratching the surface. All their perorations and pressures did not cut through centuries of customs which had operated against women. Women continued to live in subjugation. From birth, the fair sex were trained to obey, to seek her happiness in the service of her master, to adjust and accommodate to the whims of her man, to eschew all thoughts that ran counter to those of her man.

Women remained, by and large, unaffected by national liberation. Their indifference to what was happening all around them left them where they were. They had votes, but they cast their votes according to specific instructions given by their men. They could not lift themselves above their state of second class citizenship. Their apathy got reflected in the legislative forums too. Thus, there were 23 women in the Lok Sabha in 1952. The number rose to 27 in 1957 and to 33 in 1962. But in 1967, when the first general elections during Mrs Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister was held, only 28 women got into the Lok Sabha. In 1971, this number plummeted down to 21.

No attempt was made, no serious attempt to bring the benefits of freedom to women. As in the case of the Scheduled Castes and the tribals, women too were pacified with sweet promises, militant pledges which did not get shaped into reality. Women, unable to organise themselves, at times so bound down by conventions that even nurturing any thoughts of striking out on their own made them shudder, put up with indignities and iniquities with asinine resignation. The men of India failed their women. And the women, those among them who had achieved some amount of freedom, too, failed them. The problems of the women of India was not projected by men. Nor did the elite dames, who toyed with liberation, modernity, new rules for easier divorce and larger share in decision-making forums, make any real contribution to bring some relief to the millions of their sex, kept and bred and tied down by men in a state of bondage.

No better indictment of the present state of women has been made than the one by Modhumita Mojumdar :

All patriarchal cultures believe in set predetermined roles for men and women. Men have the freedom of the world and can even afford to be iconoclasts in thought and action. It

is the woman's sphere that is circumscribed by rigid boundaries. Even a courtesan has a place in this society because she fits in so perfectly with her image of woman as a mindless sex object. Such a society also looks condescendingly at the odd woman now and then, and permits her to rise to eminence in a given sphere, provided she does not question the basic assumptions and values of the community. So we have reigning queens who do not disturb the existing equations between man and woman. ....

Mrs Gandhi too found herself in a niche, and a very important niche at that, within the existing social inequalities. And nobody with such great vested interest in the *status quo* could ever afford to rebel. So although Mrs Gandhi built for herself the image of a champion for the cause of women, particularly during the International Women's Year, with brave new statements to say that she was against discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or sex, she actually did little to improve the lot of the average Indian woman.

The men failed the women. And the elite women too failed their sisters. Thus, the women, who had remained in bondage for centuries, continued to lead listless lives, bearing with traditional courage and passivity, the agony of being tethered to an essentially barren and meaningless life, mere shadows of the men they toiled for. But did they know better ?

The failure of the masses to extend the benefits of freedom to the oppressed and the deprived cannot be ignored. This failure fanned the embers of discontent, sapped the essence of freedom, made democracy look a pale shadow of what it was when India began the tryst with destiny.

Hypocrisy became part of Indian nature. There was an unbridgeable gap between precept and practice. The tempo of such a new style was set by our leaders. The people took this up with readiness. The indiscipline which marked the moves and actions of the politicians too found ready acceptance from the people. Indiscipline and irresponsibility became the most prominent watermark of Indian society.

People avoided order and system. Elementary civic sense was absent. They would never form queues at bus stops or at

ration shops unless a minion of the law, waving a baton, imposed some order. Office workers followed their own arrival, lunch, and closing times. Work piled up while the officials and the staff enjoyed the new-found freedom to avoid work. Delay, procrastination, and indecision plagued administration. Files moved only when the interested parties followed the progress of the papers, oiling the movement by greasing the palms of the officials in the pipeline.

Trains never ran to time. None cared about the harm done to the nation when one took a free ride on the public conveyance. Every conceivable trick was exploited to secure complimentary passes for various entertainment shows. Our roads became veritable bedlam of traffic chaos. Indians refused to stick to the law voluntarily. They behaved with perfect poise when under the watchful eye of a cop, but took to the law of the jungle once they were confident that they could get away with such tactics. They trod roughly over the weak and the fragile. Might became right. The concrete jungle law had come into its own.

The indiscipline which marked the actions of the elders got reflected in the student community too. Students went on the rampage at the slightest provocation. They ran wild, destroying furniture and public transport on such absurd pretexts as the right to copy or for the removal of a teacher or for the discontinuance of the examination system.

Public sector managements too showed the laxity that invariably goes with indiscipline. Financial discipline was ignored in favour of pushing in more and more favourites into positions. Most public sector undertakings became top heavy. Naturally, they ran into the red, failed to deliver the goods, took the nation further into the morass of economic chaos. Everyone from the General Manager down to the clerk fattened himself at the cost of the factory run with public money. All the basic rules which ought to have guided an industrial concern floundered when rapacious managers came out with new tricks to subserve their interests at the cost of financial viability of the company.

The erosion of discipline hurt democracy most.

Along with indiscipline came an indifference to moral values. Each for himself became the motto of Indians. This philosophy gave the courage to traders to resort to adulteration on a massive scale. The avarice of the business community played havoc with

the health and life of the people. Even foodgrains, medicines, beverages and other articles of food got contaminated.

Politicians tried adulteration in their inimitable style. They put on a facade of simple living. Yet, they pampered themselves with all comforts. The people did not realise the double standards of our politicians. Even those who saw through the facade did not raise much hue and cry, but tried to emulate the feat of the political masters.

In an editorial published in *The Statesman*, the entire gamut of invisible incomes that flowed into the Minister's coffer was traced.

If a Cabinet Minister were taxed as an ordinary citizen is, it would be necessary for the Government to pay him Rs 4,50,000 a year ; in the case of a Deputy Minister, the figure would be Rs 1,95,000. It is not the difference between these figures and the Gandhian Rs. 500 a month which will shock the people. It is the gap between what a Minister openly draws and what he actually costs the country which seems incredible. If a Minister, as a private citizen, tried to enjoy so many tax-free benefits, he would be, in Mr Harold Wilson's phrase, 'doing time.'

While such clandestine moves, evolved surreptitiously by the political elite, continued unabated, the masses wallowed in poverty. Yet, they did not demur, except as a conversational gambit, against the ostentatious living of the politician and did not have the courage to seek a restoration of simple living and high thinking among the politicians.

This failure was matched by the credulity that the leaders enjoyed among the masses. Mutely, blindly, the people worshipped some leaders. The public acclaimed the heroes, indulged in hero-worship. Even when some details revealed that the heroes had feet of clay, the people shrugged their shoulders tolerantly as if to say "great men make great mistakes." Thus, the people helped the politicians to pull wool over their eyes. It was the gullibility of the masses that helped Pandit Nehru to survive after the Chinese debacle. The people hailed him, even though he had kept the nation and even the elected representatives of the people in the dark

about the deteriorating situation on the Sino-Indian border till it could not be concealed any longer. The wrath of the masses sent Krishna Menon into a political wilderness, but Pandit Nehru who was as much responsible continued at the helm of affairs.

It was public gullibility which helped Mrs Gandhi to resort to immoral measures under the name of progress. Two measures which were based on expediency and had little to do with the welfare of the masses—the abolition of the privileges of the princes and the benefits enjoyed by the members of the ICS—appealed to the people, but they were against the norms of morality. It was a negation of the dogma flaunted on our national emblem. SATYAM-EVA JAYATE. (Truth Triumphs).

The credibility gap is brought out vividly by the veteran journalist, Shiv Lal :

The small-scale industries that closed down during the Emergency account for at least 30 per cent of the total industrial units which numbered 1,623 in 1975. In 1976, the number went down to 1,187. This was representative of the condition of the industrial sector in other parts of the country. The textile industry of West Bengal alone reported that Rs. 2 crores worth of unsold cloth was dumped in its godown because of decreasing purchasing power of the people. A total of 9,000 business houses and factories, 31 cotton textile mills, more than 100 steel mills (mini) and most engineering units catering to textile mills were closed down during Emergency. Price stamping of cloth raised the prices of the wholesale market by about 5 to 10 per cent.

Prices of other goods started showing an alarming increase during the Emergency itself. The index of wholesale prices at 311.3 on August 28, 1976, was as much as 10 per cent higher than that on March 20, 1976.....wholesale grain prices rose by Rs 22 to Rs 30 per quintal. Wheat prices increased from an average of Rs 160 to Rs 185 per quintal, jowar from Rs 140 to Rs 166 per quintal, bajra Rs 110 to Rs 125 per quintal, gram Rs 130 to Rs 190, urad from Rs 220 to Rs 240 per quintal.....

The Planning Commission set up a target of 0.9 million hectares for additional irrigation facilities while Mrs Gandhi claimed in her broadcast to the nation a target of 5 million hectares. The actual achievement was 0.8 hectares. 25 per cent of the total villages were without drinking water facilities before the Emergency, during the Emergency and after the Emergency. As against 2,600 MW of additional electric generation promised by Mrs Gandhi, only 1440 MW of additional electric generation was achieved as per the concerned Minister in Parliament.....The price of electricity to farmers was six times the price charged to industrialists and 20 times that charged to Birla. The production of controlled cloth was actually 350 million metres during the Emergency as against the announced 1,200 million metres. The Urban Land Ceiling Act, as per exemptions under Section 19 allowed by the authorities, had exempted 90 per cent of the land from the purview of the Act because this land belonged to big industrialists...The figures of the educated unemployed in the Employment Exchange registers rose by 10 per cent during the Emergency.

Yet, so long as the Emergency lasted, the media and the Press joined hands to create a rosy picture of the economy. And the people swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker.

In the ultimate analysis, the guilt for the imposition of authoritarian rule rests squarely on our shoulders. This was brought about by the deterioration of the value system. As A.S. Raman noted, 'religion was replaced by regionalism, ethics by expediency, heroism by hypocrisy, faith by fashion, scholarship by showmanship, sensibility by superciliousness, creative conformity by modernism, and magnanimity by meanness.'

We brought democracy to a dismal end. We devalued it by failing to be vigilant and watchful. We weakened it by pursuing selfish interests that went against national interests. We divided ourselves on the basis of caste, creed, language, region and religion. We created barriers to nationalism by fighting for petty benefits. Thus, we prepared the ground for the Emergency. To quote another famous journalist, B.G. Verghese :

The Emergency represented something more than the iniquities and aberrations of Mrs Gandhi. It is wrongly seen as an event, a single episode, with one or more proximate causes such as the Allahabad judgement and the immediately preceding Bihar and Gujarat movements. More truly, the Emergency proclamation of June 25, 1975, represented the culmination of a decade-long process of system-breakdown, loss of direction, irrelevance and mounting anger and frustration over corruptions, ineptitude and callousness.

To some extent, we have expiated our guilt by resurrecting democracy at the first available opportunity. But that does not absolve us of our guilt. We are all guilty, every one of us.

## Postscript

Democracy was redeemed by us in March, 1977. But, we seem to be none-too-eager to pay the price that democracy demands. We have thus left democracy to fend for itself. We are neither vigilant nor watchful.

The people, by and large, were carried away by the lofty words uttered with vehemence and passion by the new political leaders assuring the people of a new era of progress and prosperity. They were delighted to hear the pledge taken by the elected representatives, to usher in a free, progressive Gandhian India. The pledge read: "We, the elected representatives of the people of India, assembled here at the samadhi of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, seek inspiration from him and solemnly pledge to endeavour earnestly to fulfil the task that he began; to serve our people and give our best to the weakest among them; to uphold the inalienable rights to life and liberty of the citizens of our Republic; to promote national unity and harmony by working together in a spirit of dedication and with a sense of sure direction that his life and work impart and to practise austerity and honesty in personal and public life."

The people should have known that these words signified nothing, that the pledge comprised, as it had many times before, merely empty words.

For almost immediately after the oath-taking ceremony at Rajghat, the Janata representatives rushed headlong into the tussle for power, into the struggle for the highest office. There were three strong contenders, each convinced that he alone could give the nation a new direction, each firm in his resolve not to let go this chance to

occupy the highest office. Thus, the very first act of the Janata leaders, after their pledge before the samadhi of the Father of the Nation, was to give a mighty blow to the concept of harmony by working together in a spirit of dedication.'

The Janata Party, a strange conglomeration of disparate elements, brought together only by their common antagonism to Mrs Gandhi, appropriately under the dubious banner of "Indira Hatao," subscribing to differing political ideologies, began to fall apart under the strain of electing the country's future Prime Minister. The infights, the patch works, the adjustments and accommodations made behind the scene carried the distinct odour of the Congress style of 1965 and 1967 when Kamaraj darted around working out all sorts of formulas to get Mrs Gandhi elected as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. At one stage, it looked as if the suave veteran Harijan leader and political heavy weight, Jagjivan Ram, would wrest the high office. But deft rumours, shrewd manipulations, sly deals and some horse-trading tilted the balance in favour of Morarji Desai.

The election of Morarji Desai was the outcome of a political compromise. He thus assumed office, but with invisible fetters to his freedom to act. He was not free to lead. He had to yield to the views of two powerful forces, each working counter to the other.

The bitter infight in the Janata Party, which preceded the election of Morarji Desai as the leader, was a clear pointer to the future. It indicated that the politicians were back at their pet game, that they would work together only so long as it suited their personal interests, that the first casualty in the style of functioning of the Janata leaders would be the very ideal which they had declared at the solemn pledge-taking ceremony at Rajghat.

The pique displayed by the Congress for Democracy before it finally agreed to drop its identity and become a part and parcel of the Janata, showed the crack in the unity at the top. The Trinity, the name by which the three top leaders of the Janata Party are referred to, showed a strange facet to the people. It surely did not reflect 'a sense of sure direction.'

The readiness with which the Janata Party came out with a moral principle stretched it to give it political justification, and

dismissed the Congress Government in nine States revealed that the veterans who now led the Janata Party knew how to exploit the tradition built by the Congress.

The murky proceedings behind the elections of the leaders of the Janata Legislative Parties in the States, after the elections, had the masterly touch of the dexterity of the Congress bigwigs at the Centre in the heydays of Mrs Gandhi. The legislators had the freedom to support the candidates whom the high and mighty at New Delhi had tipped for the posts. The Chief Ministers were men through whom the Janata leaders could influence events in the States. They were masks behind which hid the men who actually ruled. It became almost like a division of spoils. The two major constituents of the Janata—the BLD and the Jana Sangh—walked away with the cakes.

The constituents of the Janata Party—the Congress (O) the BLD, the Jana Sangh and the CFD—did not surrender their characteristics and merge fully into the ideals of the ruling Party. Outwardly they ceased to exist, but in reality they continued to influence the actions and reactions of the Janata members. They pulled and tugged in diverse directions. Their antics often spilled beyond the limits of the facade of unity and left discordant notes in the public mind. Thus, the people had the strange spectacle of Morarji Desai sternly refusing to yield to the pressures of the employees of the Maharashtra Government while George Fernandes expressed all out support to the striking employees.

The differences between the constituent units rippled around, caught even the State Governments in strange tangles. The failure to merge completely into a political structure prepared the ground for a confrontation between the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh and one of the lady ministers in his Cabinet. The lady minister was involved in a sex scandal and it was widely rumoured that the Chief Minister had a hand in it.

In Haryana, the drama took a strange turn with another lady minister publicly berating the Chief Minister for his anti-labour policy and the Chief Minister hitting back by unceremoniously dismissing her from the Ministry.

In Uttar Pradesh, the tumults of disunity forged out the eerie

drama of the Chief Minister dismissing a minister from his Cabinet for no apparent reason.

The Party maintained *ad hoc-ism*, very much in the style of the Congress. The Party officials, from the President downwards are nominated, not elected. As an interim arrangement, by a Party which did not have enough time to work out the modularies of the merger of diverse groups, *ad hoc-ism* was perhaps the only available solution. But, this explanation fails to cut ice after nearly fifteen months of its formation. And it is inevitable that *ad hoc-ism* which prevails at the various levels of the Party leaves a bitter taste in the concoction of democracy that the Party sets before the people.

The Janata Manifesto, circulated before the elections in March 1977, spoke of a clean administration. It was emphatically asserted that corruption would be rooted out. The people were told that all ubiquitous laws, including the much criticised MISA would be scrapped. The Judiciary, the Manifesto averred, would get back the powers taken away from it. Once again, democracy would flourish, with the three wings—the legislature, the judiciary and the executive—working in cohesion, keeping checks and balances on each other.

Supplementary Manifestoes issued by local leadership held out sops to sectional and sectarian interests.

Thus, the Janata Manifesto of Delhi spoke of ending the demolition by DDA, promised to regularise unauthorised colonies, proposed scrapping the lease on land, offered to allow professionals to practise in residential buildings. The Manifesto pledged to do away with the Sales Tax.

But, immediately after the elections, the Janata Party forgot all about the Manifesto. New considerations entered the reckoning of the rulers. The demands of office forced them to veer away from the Manifesto. The gap between what the Party had pledged and what the Party actually wanted to get done widened.

The swerve from the essence of the Manifesto became apparent when the leaders of the Janata Party, including the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, expressed second thoughts on taking the MISA out of the Statute books. They haggled over the basic contents of the MISA. Someone came out with a bright idea, proposed that the draconian MISA could be made a part of the

Criminal Procedure Code. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister lauded the proposal. It looked as if MISA would reappear under a new garb, that preventive detention would plague Indian society for ever.

But, some members in the Party, with the basic element of honesty, led by Jethmalani, firmly opposed the move. Luckily, their pressure tactics worked.

It might well be argued that the Janata Party has met its commitment to the masses and has scrapped the MISA. But the people can't forget that the top leaders of the Party seriously considered its retention until they were cajoled, goaded and forced to redeem the pledge to the people is indicative of the rot that has set in the political machinery.

The MISA was scrapped, albeit hesitantly.

But, there are other promises that have been given the go by.

Authoritarian attitudes are visible in many of the stances of the national leaders.

A typical, I-am-right and I-know-what-is-good-for-the-country attitude is definitely perceptible in the rigidity on the issue of prohibition. The reluctance to discuss the style and content of the relations between the Centre and the States too carry unmistakable signs of dictatorial tendencies. Democracy believes in discussing every issue, in giving an opportunity to all sections of the populace to express their views and then to settle the issue on the basis of majority opinion. Discussion, thus forms the very essence of democracy. And where discussion is stifled, where dissent is discouraged, democracy cannot flourish.

Other strands of the Janata functioning make one wonder whether there has been a qualitative change in the Indian democracy.

On 23rd December, 1977, Delhi based politicians staged a show of strength which had been very frequently displayed by the Capital city during Mrs Gandhi's times. It marked the 76th birthday of Mr Charan Singh. The day was celebrated as Kisan Day. Lakhs of farmers collected at the Boat Club. They came in trucks, commissioned with tacit official support. The *Indian Express* charged that a sub-magistrate of Hissar had summoned 60 trucks for sending people to Delhi to swell the numbers at the Boat Club rally. It

was also stated that many of the trucks and buses which came to Delhi had no valid permit to enter Delhi, that many of the buses were challaned, that the challans were later withdrawn. If true, this muscle flexing and political *tamasha* is nothing more than a subtle imitation of what had been done by the Congress. The Janata, in fact, had taken a tip from the political masters in the art.

The Information Departments at the Centre and in the States continued the style absorbed by them during the days of Mrs Gandhi. They came out with big insertions in the Press, eulogising the feats of the Janata regime in a short duration. They distributed pamphlets, stressing the achievements of the administration.

Such publicity techniques were evolved and perfected during the last decade of Congress rule. The Janata rulers did not fail to capitalise on the propaganda machinery inherited by them.

The Janata Party did not come out with flying colours in handling the arrest of Mrs Gandhi. It was all a hush-hush affair when Tata was displaced from the chairmanship of Air India. Civil servants had a taste of the Janata style when Vohra, then Secretary to the Petroleum Ministry, was unceremoniously arrested and placed under suspension.

The intellectuals have reverted back to scholastic discussions of issues that are of vital importance to the nation. The civil servants, by and large, are ready to toe the line, defined by the political masters. The Press is still to get out of its debts to the Janata. And criticisms of the regime are, by and large muted and muffled. C.R. Irani of the *Statesman* has charged that the Janata leaders are not averse to the idea of controlling the Press through selective advertisements. An eminent journalist, S.K. Datta Ray, took the Press to task for improperly reporting the case of Maneka Gandhi, for failing to carry the report that the Supreme Court had cautioned the Executive in impounding passports.

It is as if the bad old days are back again, as if the Emergency was a bad dream, as if we can resume the crimes that led the nation to authoritarianism and still avoid the penalty of our guilt.

The industrialists are bursting with plans to capture new markets. They are aided by the latest budget which makes more public money available for investment in new industries. The planners have come out with a new concept, a rolling plan idea,

which is expected to keep the plan moving smoothly ahead. Educationists are having second thoughts on the ten plus two system because the new political masters have some reservations on the present pattern of education. Organised labour is most vociferous again, and is clamouring for a larger share in the limited resources of the nation. The rich landlords are smug and complacent, now that the age of draconian land reforms has receded. The poor peasants are wallowing in poverty. Bonded labour continues. Atrocities on Harijans have become a point of dispute between the Janata Party and Mrs Gandhi's Congress. It is the setting for public exploitation. There is no matching will to stem the rot and to bring real relief to the untouchables. Political corruption too has not abated.

The simple living and high thinking which the Janata leaders promised are nowhere to be seen. The Ministers first announced that they would move into small houses, but immediately entered the fray to get the best bungalows allotted to themselves. The heavy expenditure incurred by the Government on furnishing the bungalows of the Ministers do not bear any relation to the austerity that had been the motto. The telephone bills of the Ministers are fat, at times running parallel to the bills that the Congress Ministers used to get. Planes have been held up to serve the VIPs; trains had been delayed to pick up the new masters; official rules have been subtly bypassed to provide facilities to the men who are at the helm of affairs.

We redeemed democracy. Will we be able to nurture it ?

## Hypocrisy is the best policy\*

Every man, every art has its hypocrisy. 'The world is fed with little truth and many lies', says Romain Rolland. I can neither vouchsafe for every man and every art, nor for the world at large, but applied to Delhi's politicians and their murky politicking, Romain Rolland's dictum seems to be an understatement. Every man and every art, including the art of politics, may have its hypocrisy, but what will happen if politicians accept it as a philosophy of life and the government adopts it as policy? That is what seems to be happening in Delhi's corridors of power. Congressmen and Janatawallahs both are playing the game with abandon and with no holds barred. Their styles and the substance, at times, are so similar that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Janata leaders, may, however, very well claim the dubious distinction of being one-up over their competitors.

The Janata politicians opened their account at Rajghat, with a ceremony marked by a sombre and solemn note. Donned in spotless white khaddar, the Janata MPs exuded an aura of purity and innocence. They took the oath, administered by Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, that they would uphold Gandhian values and ideals. How many oath-taking MPs and leaders had any faith in him and his ideals? Gandhiji must have wondered about them from beneath the mound covered with a thick layer of flowers. Congressmen had committed countless sins in his name for thirty long years, and it was now Janata's turn to exploit him. How ironic that Gandhiji should become the greatest source and symbol of hypocrisy in Indian politics and that every politician should trade in his name and fame! Politicians, as such, are never credited for saying what

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\*reproduced from Sunday Vol. 5 Issue 36 (20th November, 1977) written by Mr Shamim Ahmed Shamim.

they mean, and meaning what they say, but when politicians of differing ideas, ideals and ideologies use a common idiom and share the same platform, the result is confusion worse confounded. That is what the Delhi politicians seem to be promoting these days. Notwithstanding the protestations of the Janata leaders, the Janata Party is based on a hypocrisy of common ideals, but nothing betrays its hypocritical character more than the hypocritical utterances of its senior and not so senior leaders.

From the Prime Minister down to the lowest Party functionary, every Janata leader has his fads and idiosyncracies. One such fad is austerity and this is where their hypocrisy is the most pronounced. Before assuming the role of rulers, the Janata leaders were very critical of the ostentatious life-style of their predecessors, their foreign trips and their big, posh bungalows. Now the rulers have changed, but the rules are the same. The new rulers are living in the same sprawling bungalows, over-furnished by their predecessors—the West Bengal government is retaining a house that Mr S. S. Ray rented (and was roundly abused for) in Delhi. They have adopted the same lifestyle with minor variations, to suit their convenience; and they continue to talk of Gandhi and austerity. The President of the Republic and an ex-Janata leader, took the joke too far and too seriously, by deciding to vacate Rashtrapati Bhavan and live in a simple and modest house (He is yet to move into Hyderabad House though). He also announced a drastic cut in his monthly salary, to demonstrate his penchant for Gandhian austerity and simple living. But no sooner had he announced his Gandhian approach and ideas of the Presidency than he had to go in for a very expensive and un-Gandhian course of treatment for his cancerous lung. He flew to America with a team of doctors, a host of officers and relatives and returned after a successful operation to live in a 'simple and modest house'.

Another fad of some of the Janata politicians, headed by Prime Minister Desai, which has reached the alarming proportions of an obsession, is prohibition. Mr Desai's passion for prohibition is understandable, in the context of his claim to be the only true Gandhian. But Ga॒dhibji did not believe in the use of force which Morarjibhai is threatening to use in enforcing his policy of prohibition. Has Mr Desai become more Gandhian than Gandhi

himself ? Before enjoining people not to drink, has the Prime Minister made sure that all his Cabinet colleagues, Party leaders, and high-ups in his own Secretariat have given up drinking ? The Prime Minister knows that his Cabinet and Party colleagues drink and no policy of prohibition can prevent them from drinking. Not even the prohibitive price of foreign liquor. But that has neither deterred nor discouraged him from issuing threats and warnings to his Party men that action will be taken against them if they drink. As no such action has been taken, and none is likely to be taken in future, only two conclusions or inferences can be drawn. Either every Janata Party member has stopped drinking in deference to the Prime Minister's wish or Morarji's warnings are an exercise in hypocrisy.

The latest in this prohibition hypocrisy pertains to the judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. It is reported that judges will have to take an oath that they will not drink as long as they are on the bench. But why choose judges? Why should not a Minister take an oath that he would not drink so long as he is a Minister and if this is made obligatory, I am sure it would act as a dampener for those scrambling for and seeking ministerial office. But that would not suit the hypocritical politicians at Delhi and, therefore, the Supreme Court and High Court judges are targets.

Nothing has exposed Janata hypocrisy more than the recent arrest of the former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Long before her actual arrest, every leader from the Prime Minister down to Mr Raj Narain had assured the country that she would not be arrested for political reasons, though arrested she would be. At last, when she was arrested, it turned out to be the great fiasco the Janata Party and its leadership have had to face up to date. Looking at the pre-arrest and post-arrest behaviour of the Janata leadership, it appears that the motto 'Honesty is the best policy' has been replaced by 'Hypocrisy is the best policy in politics'. It goes to the credit of Mrs Gandhi that she has been trying to completely expose the well of hypocrisy the Janata leaders are living in. It was hypocritical to say that Mrs Gandhi would not be arrested for political reasons. In fact she should have been arrested only on political grounds, for declaring the Emergency, imposing her personal and her son's rule, trying to destroy the country's

judicial system, subverting the Constitution and imprisoning thousands of people without any justification. These are valid reasons; and those who voted against Mrs Gandhi and her Party in March, 1977 would understand and appreciate if she were arrested on these grounds. But this would not fit in with the Janata hypocrisy about democracy, decency, rule of law and fair play. She had, therefore, to be arrested for some flimsy, clumsy and technical violations of ordinary law. And when the whole drama rehearsed for months together proved to be a farce, Janata leaders from the Prime Minister down to Mr Raj Narain and Mr Madhu Limaye, instead of courageously admitting their bunglings as Gandhiji would have done, started putting on a brave face and declaring to the world that there was no political vendetta involved. 'Had there been one, Mrs Gandhi would not have been arrested at 5 p.m. with her residential telephone lines undisturbed!' The Home Minister, Mr Charan Singh sounded ridiculously hypocritical when he said, "Mrs Gandhi is my sister and she is the daughter of my beloved leader Jawaharlal Nehru".

Mr Charan Singh is reported to be a Jat who would call a spade a spade. But that was long long ago. Now he is the Union Home Minister and hypocrisy being the official policy of the new Government he had to call Indira his sister and Nehru his leader, though his hatred for both is very well known. "The wrongs committed by Mrs Gandhi (Mr Charan Singh's sister) and the indignities she heaped on the nation call for a trial on the Nuremberg model", said Charan Singh. "But we rest content with the ordinary law". Resting content with the ordinary law sounds magnanimous, but it is not so. The Home Minister was so sure of himself and of his case against Mrs Gandhi that while ordering her arrest he could only visualise a flood of telegrams pouring in from all corners of the country, congratulating him on his 'bold action'. And when this did not happen, and his master stroke turned out to be a damp squib, Mr Singh chose to be magnanimous. It was left to other Party luminaries like Mr Chandra-shekhar, Mr Madhu Limaye, Mr Nanaji Deshmukh and others to find a scape-goat for Mr Charan Singh's costly bungle and they did find one in the CBI. How pathetic and hypocritical! Why could not Mr Charan Singh and others own up and admit

their mistake, shed their inhibitions and say in a very straightforward manner that they had bungled ? Why can't they admit the political responsibility of the decision and its consequences ? Why should they follow Mrs Gandhi's example in blaming Government officials every time for their failure or bungling? Why does not Mr Charan Singh resign and set a healthy precedent ? The political vendetta of the Janata Party leaders against Mrs Gandhi is not only justified and understandable, it is also quite natural. But the Gandhian image they want to live up to, prevents them from admitting this and hence the hypocritical absurdity of fairplay.

Another classic example of Janata hypocrisy is evident from the ambiguous stand on MISA. When Mr Mohan Dharia talked of using MISA against hoarders and profiteers some time ago, there was such a hue and cry in the Party that poor Mr Dharia has not been heard to say anything on this subject since then, and has contented himself with the issuing of warnings. But, all the same, MISA continues to be on the statute book and there are no indications of its removal. In the meantime, the Madhya Pradesh Janata Government has armed itself with a mini-MISA to face a strike threat and ignored the order of the Janata chief, Mr Chandrashekhar, to withdraw it. The fact is that the Janata rulers know the effectiveness of MISA in curbing the activities of anti-social elements, but the leaders being prisoners of their democratic 'professions' cannot justify its use. So to have or not to have the MISA is the Janata dilemma. Why cannot they take a straightforward stand on this issue ?

The delay and indecisiveness in formulating an economic policy is the price the country is paying for the hypocrisy of the new ruling tribe. With their diverse ideologies, contradictory approaches and individual fads, it is impossible to evolve a coherent, uniform and purposeful economic policy and we may have to wait indefinitely till the Janata leaders shed their hypocrisy and give us a viable economic policy. It is difficult to conclude as to who represents the Party's economic thinking and its policies, because Mr Chandrashekhar and Mr Charan Singh, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Subramaniam Swamy and many others are simultaneously expounding contradictory economic theories in the name of the Janata Party. I am sure the Janata leaders know

the difference between democracy and hypocrisy as inner-Party democracy.

Family planning, which got a severe jolt during the Indira-Sanjay game of 'targets', is now the target of Janata hypocrisy. This is too serious and sensitive a subject to be left to Mr Raj Narain who has introduced an element of the macabre to the tragedy of numbers by his own experience of *brahmacharya*. The population explosion in the country can brook no delay and there is little scope for Gandhian 'experiments with truth' in this field. But the Janata Government is still dithering between persuasion and coercion, between intimidation and motivation. It is time the Janata politicians gave up their ambiguity and indecision, shed their hypocritical cloak and adopted a positive and vigorous family planning programme. The beginning and wisdom, according to a Chinese proverb, is to call things by their right name. Let us be wise for a change and call family planning by its right name and not as family welfare.

The independence of the judiciary, we are told, is an article of faith with the Janata leaders in general, and the Prime Minister in particular. Does not everybody remember the hue and cry which our present day ruler-politician raised when Mr A.N. Ray superseded his senior judges and became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court during Indira's regime? But that was the role of an Opposition and the protest was part of the game. Now that the Janata leaders are in the Government, they must behave like a Government and leave it to the Congress to behave as an Opposition. That explains the supersession of two Gujarat High Court judges. In other words, that is the extension of Janata hypocrisy to the judiciary, "We must do nothing to lower the prestige of the judiciary and politicians should avoid involving judges in politics", so said our beloved Prime Minister, but only three days after he had indicted Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Dayal of Delhi for having released Mrs Gandhi unconditionally (and thus upsetting the Janata apple cart). In the opinion of legal experts, never before has a judge been condemned and criticised so severely by such a high dignitary as the Prime Minister. And all this at a time when an appeal against his order was pending before the High Court. So our leaders are all for the independence of the judiciary, provided the judges decide, in their favour. Ah!

The Jana Sangh-RSS controversy is another aspect of the built-in hypocritical character of our ruling Party. Those asking this front organization to merge with Janata and those opposing it are both involved in the game. The Jana Sangh, a major constituent unit of the Janata Party, wants to retain its separate identity under the cover of the RSS, but would not admit it openly. So, it has decided to defend the RSS as a cultural and not a political organization. The socialists and the Gandhites are advocating the RSS merger rather vehemently with a view to destroying the separate identity of a fascist organization. Both sides understand each other's game perfectly well but continue to play it. In common parlance the game is called hypocrisy—at the moment a favourite sport of Janata leaders.

Not to be left behind, the Congress leaders, past-masters in hypocrisy, have also started playing the game with gusto. Every Congress leader of any consequence, barring the ones belonging to the infamous 'caucus', hates Mrs Indira Gandhi for what she did to him and the party during her 11 years' misrule. But all of them lose no opportunity to praise her leadership and achievements. Some of the bolder ones who had chosen to speak the language of their conscience have started retreating and have fallen in line. The recent meeting of the AICC was a classic example of Congress hypocrisy. Mrs Gandhi in connivance and assistance, of trusted disciples wanted herself to become Congress President. Poor Brahmananda Reddy ! In a weaker moment, he had even promised to step down in her favour. But the adventure, unfortunately for Mrs Gandhi and fortunately for the Congress, failed. "I do not seek any office now, and I have never sought so in the past" said Mrs Gandhi, after realising the futility of her attempts to usurp the high office. Senior Congress leaders repeated the hypocritical mantras of unity in the wake of distressing disunity in the Party. It was hoped that after their traumatic experience of the March 1977 poll, Congress leaders would be willing to do some straight talking and taking hard decisions, but this was a short-lived hope. With the re-emergence of Mrs Gandhi, the Congress Party is relapsing into its old hypocrisy double talk and double deal. The Congress Party can afford it but I am afraid the Janata cannot. In the words of William Hazlitt, "The only voice that cannot be forgiven is

hypocrisy. The repentance of hypocrisy is itself hypocrisy." It is a pity that the people have to choose between an unscrupulous, unabashed, unrepentant but skilful lady on the one hand, and a prevaricating, indecisive, hypocritical though wellmeaning leadership on the other.

## APPENDIX II

# Intellectuals and Indian Democracy\*

Intellectuals everywhere are a class apart. They represent, so to speak, the aristocracy of the mind. Their main concern is with knowledge and its discovery and transmission. In almost all classical societies they have occupied a position of pre-eminence based primarily on the fact that ideas have usually been regarded as one of the prime movers of society.

This was before the beginning of the modern age in Europe. During the middle ages the Church became an important protagonist in the contest for the possession of men's minds. To a great extent, all thinking was channelised within the limits set by the Church. Dissident voices were not uncommon, however. Modern European history records many instances of conflicts and tensions revolving around the desire of the Church to control the thinking of its adherents and the refractory behaviour of some of them. The climax was reached in the nineteenth century in the classical confrontation between religion and science.

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of a new factor, and that was the rise of the modern university. More and more intellectuals joined the ranks of universities. By the beginning of the twentieth century, universities and research institutes had become the prime nurseries of scholarship and scientific research.

In India, the pattern of growth of intellectuals has been somewhat different. Raja Ram Mohan Roy has been justly described as the first modern intellectual of India. He was steeped in oriental learning and at the same time was influenced by the West in a profound and significant way. While India has had a long tradition of learning and men of learning have been given great respect, even adulation, it would be difficult to describe them as intellectuals in the modern sense of the term.

\*reproduced from The Times of India (25th December, 1977)  
written by Mr Amrik Singh.

An intellectual is more than a scholar. Scholarly instincts constitute an important component of his self but there is an additional dimension to it. An intellectual is expected to be aware of the social relevance of his ideas, of their inter-relationships and, indeed, of the wider significance of his own standing and role in society. In other words, the word "intellectual" is not merely a replacement for the word 'scholar'. It also implies a certain extension of the concept.

Scholars existed in earlier societies. But it is difficult to talk of intellectuals in earlier societies. Intellectuals represent a relatively modern phenomenon and are to be found for the most part in modern societies.

It was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century that India came to acquire some of the characteristics of a modern country. Since a good many of these characteristics were derived from western sources and the channel of transmission was the mastery and use of a western language, it stands to reason that no one could be described as an intellectual if he was well versed only in oriental learning. Some knowledge of the West was essential and perhaps an indispensable part of his mental equipment. It is in this sense that the uniqueness and historical importance of Raja Ram Mohan Roy has come to be recognised and the pioneering role played by him has already become a part of modern Indian history.

The confluence of the East and the West that Raja Ram Mohan Roy represented might be partly explained by the age in which he lived. At the same time it represented the essence of the Indian situation. No one in India could presume to be an intellectual if he was not aware of the Indian tradition and at the same time had not imbibed, to some extent, the ideas and values of the Western world. More than anything else, it was a question of striking the right balance.

In other words, an Indian intellectual could have a sense of social relevance only when he lived in both the worlds, the tradition which he had inherited and the new knowledge which he had acquired. A great deal of what was accomplished in the nineteenth century in India in the cultural field and in the world of learning is to be explained by this dual and almost equal emphasis upon these two elements.

With growing westernisation however, the balance began to tilt against the indigenous tradition. Developments since 1947 have accentuated this process to such an extent that an intellectual in India today is hardly aware either of his tradition or of the reality around him. This is not the occasion to go into the question of how or why it has happened. All that is important is to recognise that an Indian intellectual today is on the whole isolated from the mainstream of Indian life. In consequence, even while professionally competent for some time, he lacks that kind of authenticity that intellectuals elsewhere possess.

The principal reason for the intellectual being cut off from the mainstream of Indian life is the fact that he operates through the medium of English. Here is a paradoxical situation. Unless an Indian knows English and indeed knows it well, he cannot remain abreast of modern knowledge. Very little knowledge is being generated in the Indian languages and therefore an intellectual in India is obliged to be proficient in English. Quite often the depth and extent of an Indian's knowledge is judged by his knowledge and mastery of English. The common presumption therefore is that if he is deficient in his knowledge of English, he is also deficient in knowledge. Indeed, this presumption is so widespread that it does not seem necessary to dilate upon it.

But the vast majority of people do not know English. An intellectual therefore lives in two worlds ; his own world of ideas which he derives from his study of books in English, and the common 'work-a-day' world in which he is obliged to live. There is hardly any interaction between these two. The gulf between intellectuals and the rest of the population in any country is usually wide. But there are always points of contact between the two. In any case, they are both heirs to the same tradition. This gives them, to some extent, a certain community of outlook and a set of values.

Such a community of outlook does not exist in India primarily for the reason that intellectuals live in a world of their own. Intellectuals communicate with one another through English and their frame of reference derives from an intensive knowledge and use of English. As a matter of fact, the typical intellectual feels that though physically a resident of India, intellectually he belongs elsewhere.

The majority of Indian intellectuals accept this situation as being normal and perhaps the very condition of their existence and survival. It does not even occur to them that they are isolated from the mainstream of Indian life. On the contrary, they feel so superior to the rest of the population that even to talk of there being any community of outlook between them and 'others' looks like an act of impertinence to them.

A very small number, however, do feel uncomfortable about this situation. This is particularly true of those who are socially committed. Social commitment implies the desire to change society. This, in turn, obliges them to interact with those in regard to whom they feel superior otherwise. But when overcoming their reservations and misgivings, they do condescend to interact with them, they find that there is not only a big social gulf between them, there is also an equally big barrier. It is the barrier of communication.

They can communicate through English but the common people do not understand English. Before long, communication begins to falter. Therefore either they give up the attempt to communicate and retreat into themselves, or keep up some kind of a faltering attempt at communication. In either case the result is wholly unsatisfactory.

It is in this context that the politician enters the scene. The politician operates through the language of the masses. Not only does he use that language he uses that idiom too. Indeed, he displays extraordinary ability in establishing his links with the masses. Whether he is a public relations expert or he is a man who practises deceit and chicanery on a large and systematic scale is beside the point.

The fact remains that the politician is 'utterly successful in manipulating the common people to support him in whatever he does. And because he gets their support he gets elected to public office. Once elected, he comes to effectively operate the levers of power and he uses power in the manner which will ensure his continued popularity. He has no ambition other than to stay in power. If in the process he can do some good and help the process of the development of the country he is glad to do so. But his basic urge is to capture power and to stay in power as long as he can.

The typical Indian intellectual watches this spectacle with a

feeling of impotence. He has a feeling of disdain for the politician because he thinks that he, the intellectual, is superior to the politician both in knowledge and understanding. This is true up to a point. But the politician is superior to the intellectual in two respects.

One, the politician understands people and what excites them and moves them. In this sense his knowledge is certainly less academic than that of an intellectual but it is more concrete. Two, he has power which the intellectual does not have and the intellectual craves for power. The intellectual can get it only when the politician deigns to give him a share. On his own he is unable to achieve power for he lacks those skills which the politician possesses.

The intellectual craves for power partly for reasons of ego gratification but largely for reasons which are much more mundane. A typical Indian intellectual wants a job in a university or a research institute or a newspaper or some government institution. Most of them are directly or indirectly controlled by politicians. Whatever be the nature of the job and whatever be its level, the politician almost always has a say in the matter. The intellectual therefore is obliged to court the politician.

What this situation does to the intellectual's morale need not be commented upon here. What is necessary to underline is the undoubted feeling of inferiority and impotence that an intellectual comes to have vis-a-vis the politician. When he chooses to reflect upon this situation he can see quite clearly that the politician has got the better of him partly owing to the exigencies of the situation but partly owing to the ability of the politician to forge channels of communication with the common people.

Like the intellectual, the politician, too, lives in two worlds. To some extent he lives in the same world as the intellectual does. His life style is almost the same though somewhat more extravagant and even corrupt. But in his attitudes and concerns he is not particularly different from an intellectual. He also patronises the same social institutions, sends his children to the same school and does a variety of things wherein they resemble each other in many more ways than the intellectual would be prepared to concede. At the same time, the politician never forgets that he

belongs to another world also, the world of the common people. He knows how to deal with them and how to win their favour. This enables him to get into power and then stay there as long as he is not displaced by another politician.

When the politician is in the midst of the common people, the intellectual can hardly recognise him. The politician makes himself a part of the crowd to such an extent that not only is he dressed like them, he also talks like them. Of course, in the company of intellectuals he talks differently. But in the company of the common people he talks like them. This requires a kind of ability and capacity to adjust, on the part of the politician, which the intellectual does not possess.

Being dressed like the common people is something that can be accomplished relatively easily. But where the politician scores over the intellectual is in his ability to speak in the idiom of the common man. This ability is much more than the ability to speak in the same tongue that the man in the street speaks. It is also the ability to share the same imagery, the same folklore and the same frame of reference which the common people have.

As should be evident, the intellectual is caught in a fix. If he chooses to forswear his knowledge of a foreign tongue and all that it means to him, he ceases to be an intellectual. And if he continues to be an intellectual, more or less by the very condition of his being, he is precluded from any close interaction with the common people which alone can make him feel relevant in his setting. This dilemma does not yet present itself sharply enough to most intellectuals in India.

They are content to live in a private and sterile world of their own. For recognition and approval they look abroad. Indeed, it does not seem to matter to them that they have very little to contribute in their role as citizens of the country. But with the sharpening of the economic and political crises, more and more intellectuals are coming to recognise the fact that to insulate themselves from the life of the common people is neither perhaps possible nor indeed conducive to their self-chosen role of being intellectuals.

In this situation, it is somewhat pathetic to see intellectuals pleased with themselves. What are they pleased about? Were it a question of some solid achievements of which they could feel

justly proud, it would be a different matter.

Unfortunately, most Indian intellectuals are a pale and disinherited copy of their counterparts elsewhere. Not only that, in their social attitudes and professional commitments they give ample evidence of belonging to that parasitical fringe of society which has grown unmistakably strong and numerous in recent decades. It is astonishing that in this situation instead of feeling humble, most of them feel arrogant. Maybe this is a kind of defence mechanism without which they find it difficult to survive.

While the future of Indian intellectuals is certainly a matter of considerable concern, do they have any contribution to make to the preservation and growth of Indian democracy? Unfortunately the answer is almost always in the negative.

In this situation, therefore, whether Indian democracy, as we know it today, survives or crumbles is a matter in regard to which the politician will decide in the light of his own calculations, and not for reasons of any approval or disapproval that the intellectual, smitten by his own sense of self-importance, might choose to express.

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